Down from the Mountain and into the Mill: Literacy Sponsorship and Southern Appalachian Women in the New South

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Down from the Mountain and into the Mill: Literacy Sponsorship and Southern Appalachian Women in the New South

A Dissertation Presented

by

EMMA M. HOWES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2014

Department of English

Composition and Rhetoric
Down from the Mountain and into the Mill: Literacy Sponsorship and Southern Appalachian Women in the New South

A Dissertation Presented

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In Loving Memory

of

My Grandparents:

Grace Virginia Helen Holland and Cecil Edgar Howes

and

Patricia Marie Glendening and Cornelius Herbert Ramsey
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my adviser, Donna LeCourt, for always keeping her door open and her incredible support during the researching and writing of this project. She has read countless pages of drafts and offered her suggestions for developing the ideas and polishing the very long sentences that are to follow. In addition, Haivan Hoang has offered tremendous support over the years and encouraged me to keep writing and moving forward. I also extend gratitude to my final committee member, Laura Lovett, whose helpful comments and suggestions have helped me better understand the richness of the period of my study, which I look forward to continuing to explore.

Parts of this project were only possible through the support of the Mary Lily Research Grant and the Sallie Bingham Center at Duke University, the University of Massachusetts Dissertation Research Grant, and of course the AAUW American Fellows Dissertation Grant. I also want to extend a thank you to the WildAcres Residency Program and their amazing staff in Little Switzerland, North Carolina, where I finished writing Chapter 3 tucked away in a beautiful cabin on the side of a mountain and reconnected with my muse. Each allowed me the time and money to pursue the research and writing required to complete this project and I am incredibly grateful for these gifts.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the archivists who helped me along the way, with special thanks to the staff at the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, the Southern Historical Collection and North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Rubenstein Library at Duke University, the State Archives of North Carolina in Raleigh, the Special Collections at Clemson University, and the Carolina Room at the Greenville Public Library. Additionally, I am incredibly thankful...
for the resources and conversations at the Glencoe Textile Heritage Museum, the Haw River Historical Society, the Greenville Textile Heritage Society, the Monaghan Mills Historical Society, and the Textile Heritage Center in Cooleemee. In particular, the influence of Lynn and Jim Rumley is heavily felt throughout these pages, as well as Jane Cartee, and of course Leon Neal. Thank you all for opening your doors to me during my time down south and helping me to better understand the communities I sought to study.

My research trips were also made possible by the kindness, support, and laughter of Collie Fulford, Becky Trumbull, and Beryl, who housed me, saved me coffee in the mornings, and encouraged me to run more while I worked in Durham. David Harold and Adra Raine also offered their home during my shorter research trips to the city and were wonderful friends in between my travels. Marenda Moore and Adry housed me in Greenville, SC and were kind enough to take me Contra Dancing and join me for late night pita chips in the kitchen.

A special thanks to my amazing cohort and the many wonderful friends I have been lucky enough to move through this journey with and who made sure I got out of my house every now and then, including Darren and Sara Lone Fight, Rebecca Griffin and Mike Fournier, Amy Brady, Julie Burrell, Ruth Lahti, and many others. Thank you to my dissertation group, Leslie Bradshaw, Anna Rita Napoleone, John Gallagher, Sarah Finn, and Linh Dich for all your feedback and support through the ups and downs of dissertating. To my long list of Comp big sisters I am incredibly grateful for the hotel rooms, the long walks, and the many, many conversations: Leslie Bradshaw, Linh Dich, Collie Fulford, Lauren Rosenberg, Lisha Storey, and Denise Paster. And finally,
Christiane Lenk and Lisha Storey have been great lights on many dark nights, mostly which fell on Mondays.

Finally, I want to extend my incredible gratitude to Maria Kulp for her impeccable ability to say the right thing and never-ending support over the years in the caves of Southwest Virginia and beyond. Thank you as well to my wonderful and supportive family, who have fed me and supported me in ways I can only begin to describe: Aunt Cornelia, you have been an amazing cheerleader and example; Dad and Nancy, you have been such a haven; Ethan you are the only one who gets me on Facebook and I love you; and Mom, you have been my rock. It definitely took a village to finish this project.
ABSTRACT

DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN AND INTO THE MILL: LITERACY SPONSORSHIP AND SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN WOMEN IN THE NEW SOUTH

SEPTEMBER 2014

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This project uses a materialist feminist lens to examine corporate-sponsored literacy campaigns in “model” cotton mills in North and South Carolina between 1880 and 1920. Building on work in literacy studies by Shirley Brice Heath and Elspeth Stuckey, as well as scholarship on literacy sponsorship by Deborah Brandt and Kim Donehower, my study contextualizes literacy sponsorship in mill villages of the New South as part of “welfare work” programs implemented to introduce rural white workers to industrial labor and town life. Using original archival research in conversation with primary and secondary resources, I follow the (re)construction of deficit in relation to Southern Appalachian white women, who frequently moved with their families to work in the Carolina mills. As public and private texts written by mill administrators and welfare workers picked up on these constructions, I suggest they ideologically positioned the mill industry as providing resources, including access to new literacies, to alleviate rural white poverty in the post-Reconstruction South, creating economic, social, and cultural capital. In addition to studying the motivations behind this distribution of
literacy, my work also begins to examine how mill women and their families used the
literacies they acquired in these spaces as both tools for complying with mill regulations
and to create spaces to exert agency through the cultivation of community outside the
structures of the industry.

As a result of this inquiry, I argue that studying specific moments in the history of
literacy sponsorship creates a deeper understanding of how the regulation of literacy
learning offers increased opportunities and, as Elspeth Stuckey states, can reproduce the
violence of socio-economic class stratification. While accessing the experiences of
literacy learners in this context is difficult, insights from studying literacy sponsors
during the formation of the southern mill industry highlights how literacies are formally
made accessible to particular groups of people during particular moments in history to
circulate forms of capital within larger economic systems.
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CHAPTER 1

WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE MILL: LITERACY SPONSORSHIP AND THE BUILDING OF THE NEW SOUTH

Around the year 1880 there was a distinct excitement in the air: throughout the southern United States, local and national entrepreneurs were gathering capital and machinery as a new Gospel began to spread throughout the post-Reconstruction South. Guided by the ideologies of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy; and developments in technology and mass media; businessmen and preachers, farmers and merchants claimed they had found the answer to rural white poverty and the “mountain problem.” The age of industrialization dawned in the South, flooding the area between Danville, Virginia and northern Georgia and Alabama with cotton mills and mill villages.¹ These compounds were built and owned by companies to house the large number of rural white workers who came in search of paid labor, education, and the hopes of better lives. Upon arrival at these villages, some rural whites found complex social programs in place to teach them reading, writing, and how to live in the contemporary world. These programs were called “welfare work” and included structured leisure time and classes in sewing, cooking, hygiene, and literacy for mill workers and their families. Through these activities, the industry strove to provide resources for rural whites seeking employment to better integrate into life in company towns. Mills employed “welfare workers” to run these programs, sometimes through affiliations with social organizations like the Young Women’s Christian Association (and Young Men’s Christian Association) and sometimes as independent reformers.

¹ In one estimate from James LeLoudis and Katheryn Walbert, “an average of six new mills were built every year between 1880 and 1900” in North Carolina, culminating in approximately 177 factories by 1900 (“Life on the Land”).
It is the site of these mill villages where my project takes root. In my dissertation, I studied welfare work programs, focusing on the uses of literacy learning on the “mill hill.” More specifically, my work examines literacy sponsors—the individuals and groups with the initial capital to make learning available to workers—and their motivations as they targeted women from the southern Appalachian region in their construction of literacy campaigns. In this way, I weave together conversations from literacy studies, rhetoric and composition, Appalachian studies, and feminist theory in an act of historical recovery work to better understand the alphabetic and social literacies women encountered as they moved alongside their families into southern mill villages for work, from 1880 to 1920. This project is not merely an attempt to add to the growing body of historical studies of women’s literacies; it also argues for a more materialist understanding of these literacies. My argument is set forth in this chapter as I illustrate how a materialist feminist lens allows literacy scholars to better understand the role sponsorship has played in supporting capitalist development in the US.

The introduction of methods of mass-production opened up economic and social opportunities to regions that experienced drastic change economically and socially after the Civil War and Reconstruction. In the following chapters, I offer a unique glimpse of a people and place in transition during that period. Women, in particular, frequently took on the heavy burdens of industrial and domestic labor in the move from mountain farms and other rural areas to “public work” in mills. Lois McDonald’s 1929 dissertation on “social and economic forces in certain textile mill villages” illustrates the difficulties of this position, offering the following response from a working woman reflecting on her life: ‘What with work and all, it plumb wears a body out to feed and bring up a family on
a mill wage’ (53). This statement constructs a landscape of southern mill village life in which industrial labor and the affectual and physical work of reproducing the labor power of a family intersected in the lives of working women; it illustrates the distinctiveness of their social position. While circumstances varied from mill to mill, and not all adult women living in villages worked in the mills, Linda Frankel estimates that between 1880 and 1900 two-thirds of southern mill workers were women and girls (32); women’s labor inside and outside of the home—paid or not—was instrumental in supporting the industry. The material conditions that resulted are often cited in response to the shortage of remaining textual artifacts. The story of women’s early experiences within the industry become more accessible in the 1920’s and 1930’s (Neal 1).²

In any conversation about literacy, it is important to establish the parameters of our use of the term, as its meaning has changed greatly over the decades and varies among disciplines. I understand “literacy” as a “mode of intelligibility” for expressing and navigating social life (Hennessy Profit 84 and 217): a set (or multiple sets) of skills—including reading and writing—that function as a resource for making meaning (Brandt 5, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 3-4).³ Framing literacies as resources within communities allows us to discuss how technologies for communication are socially produced as well as socially distributed. Literacy sponsorship occurs when individual learners come into contact with larger social structures and economies that impact how those resources are distributed. This orientation also emphasizes the significance of complicating the

² Due to the limited availability of archival materials, many of the intricacies of household composition are not available for this project. Therefore, when mill women are referenced, it should be recognized that this population is diverse, made up of women living in mill villages who had a variety of experiences working within the mill themselves.

³ Thus, while literacies are most often used to refer to reading and writing, they may also refer to other skills including navigating digital spaces and subsistence knowledge.
ideological connection between literacy learning and individualism. By embedding
literacies within social and economic trends, we may understand how literacy distribution
implies far more than the experiences of individual learners (Donehower, Hogg, and
Schell 96-97). Although the abilities and efforts of individual learners are certainly
significant, by contextualizing and historicizing their experiences we can better
countextualize gaps in achievement and opportunity around literacy learning and usage.

Literacy campaigns in the model southern mill village between 1880 and 1920
offer an incredibly rich site for better understanding the ways literacies and economies
are intertwined. I do this work by considering points of intersection between how learners
were positioned by sponsors and what goals sponsors hoped to accomplish in their own
work, with particular attention to the creation, circulation, and accumulation of different
forms of capital. In the chapters that follow, I pursue these ends through the following
research questions:

1) Concerning socio-historical context: How were Appalachian women in North
and South Carolina cotton mill towns discursively depicted in texts for public and
private reading audiences during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth
centuries? In what ways did these texts impact women’s access to literacies as
they circulated within the political and social context of the New South? What did
literacy symbolize within larger welfare work programs and the industry’s social
“work” to “modernize” workers? How did these perceptions fit into larger
historical educational and benevolent movements?

2) Concerning systems of literacy sponsorship: What motivations did literacy
sponsors articulate regarding the distribution of literacies to mill women? How
did these motivations implicate the creation of and accumulation of forms of capital (or not)? What kinds of capital were invested in mill benevolent work? How did literacy sponsors hope literacy learning would change how place and social space were displayed (“written”) and understood (“read”)? How did literacy learners take up these changes (or not)?

3) Concerning literacy practices and everyday usage: What kinds of literacy events took place in model mill villages and how were those events represented in historical accounts and archives? For what reasons was literacy valued, both amongst sponsors and learners? How was literacy learning and usage intertwined with other courses and skills in mill welfare work? How did the historical connection between alphabetic literacy and consumer culture impact social life on the mill hill?

Studying how literacy sponsors constructed mill women and the intended outcomes of literacy campaigns on the “mill hill” allow us peripheral access to women’s experiences and a space for critical analysis of how literacy instruction circulated within this particular time and place. In situating my study in the industrializing New South, I suggest that literacy campaigns impacted, and were impacted by, perceptions of identity through tropes of whiteness, femininity, and socio-economic class. For these reasons, a study of literacy sponsors within this context compliments scholarship circulating about literacy learners by addressing questions of motivation for sponsorship to further embed literacy campaigns within capitalist economics. By highlighting the developments of capitalism during this time as they impacted the distribution of formal literacy skills, this project helps to assert how sponsors maneuvered alphabetic literacies to increase
particular kinds of knowledge (or cultural capital) amongst women at the same time that they also taught them to live compliantly. In this way, we can gain more of a perspective on how literacy campaigns were an instrument in attempting to smooth the transition of women and their families from rural communities to industrial life and labor.

**Literacy Sponsorship as Exchange**

The field of literacy studies actively engages conversations between literacies and economies and literacies and social identities. Over the past few decades, scholars have begun to shed light on how our ability to navigate the social world through reading and writing skills have effected the spread of particular ideological standpoints (Cook-Gumperz, Damon-Moore and Kaestle, Tremmel, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell, and Edmondson), the way multiple literacies frame how we interact with a variety of texts in everyday experiences in and out of schooling (Heath, Fagan, Gere), and the links between the circulation of particular literacies and raced, classed, gendered, sexed, and religious identities that impact people’s position in the social world (Bettie, Hicks, LeCourt, Nord). This work has pushed the field into explorations of the *function* of multiple literacies within identifiable communities, localizing studies while working to keep them contextualized within larger social, political, and economic trends.

Critical work on literacy learning has also begun to highlight the broader consequences attached to literacy development and opportunity in terms of both deficit and surplus, recognizing the double-edged sword of adopting literate practices that often require learners to consider new world views. Deborah Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsorship has been especially helpful here, as it directs us to consider “who or what underwrites occasions of literacy learning and use” and why these agents make literacy
skills available in certain ways and not others (“Sponsors” 166). Brandt points out that it is “sponsors [who] set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty,” implicating uneven power relationships in at least some sponsorship exchanges that expose learners to communities beyond their home discourse communities (“Sponsors” 166-167). While new literacies create different kinds of opportunities for learners, it has become more widely recognized that they also impact relationships with home communities in ways that could be isolating (Brandt, Locklear, Sohn). Reading and writing are cognitive skills used to communicate; but their presence or absence transmits particular ways of understanding the social world and the ability (or inability) to access additional resources including economic, social, and cultural capital.

The tendency of most work on literacy sponsorship to centralize the experiences of literacy learners has set limits on how we approach the relationship between literacy campaigns and capital, honoring (for good reasons) the perspectives of only one half of the exchange (Brandt, Donehower, Halbritter and Lindquist 174). The focus on learners is especially significant in feminist work and other projects that seek the voices of women, men, and children who have been historically silenced; shedding light on the experiences of literacy learners allows us to keep these voices at the forefront, further complicating the often-positive attitudes towards literacy learning held by the field and the public (Cornelius, Donehower, Hogg, Moss Literacy). These ethnographic and historical studies about communities have often responded to larger structural claims about literacy achievement (or the lack thereof) within particular communities as a means to deeply contextualize literacy learning and difference within concepts of place and space (Heath, Cintron). While this scholarship engages with larger economic and social
structures that impact the lives of learners, their focus is not primarily on capitalist methods of production.

Highly localized studies have also worked to open the field to consider the impact of instruction and our own classroom work on students from a variety of backgrounds and in a number of different contexts. For example, Charlotte Hogg’s study of women’s literacy practices in the small Midwestern town of Paxton, Nebraska traces the presence of traditional and nonconventional gender roles in women’s literate practices. The complexities in how women wrote their own identities and their town’s history illustrated “public memory [as used to] complicate (even as they often adhere to) masculinist thinking” through constructions of “homeland” (Rural Literacies 132). Women interviewed for this project used writing as acts of agency that complicated dominant ideologies by offering an “alternative source of culture and knowledge” to honor domestic life and blurred the public/private dichotomy (From the Garden 32-33, 45, 66-67, 76-77). Studying extracurricular documents produced by women from a small town allowed Hogg to consider the ways literacies women sponsored in their local historical society decolonized aspects of their own history to illustrate a “rural literacy” that “achieve[d] the goals of sustaining life in rural areas” (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 4, 130, 132, 134, and 143).

Scholarship highlighting literacy learners emphasizes that students (of varying ages and in multiple situations) are not just empty vessels for larger sponsoring institutions, but people who make choices throughout the processes of their literacy learning, development, and usage. Kim Donehower teases out some of these choices as she locates how residents of a Southern Appalachian town navigate layers of literacy
sponsorship during the town’s history. In particular, Donehower identifies patterns of assimilation to and appropriation or rejection of literacies and the world-views they carry. Donehower also points out a variety of literacy sponsors who move through the town, including religious, academic, and governmental organizations (“Literacy Choices” 349-352). Thus, literacy learners are positioned as dynamic beings, exerting agency in the ways they interact with multiple literacies and the sponsors supporting them in their lives (“Literacy Choices” 344).

Hogg and Donehower’s work on the receiving end of sponsorship relationships opens spaces of resistance to the ideological assimilation on which many literacy scholars have focused (Stuckey, Cook-Gumperz); this talk-back complicates our understanding of how literacy, ideology, and materiality come into conversation in the lived experiences of people in communities. While literacies carry and transmit certain ideological positions, people are constantly making decisions influencing and influenced by a multitude of factors, including many that we, as scholars, may have limited or no access to. This orientation has helped the field of literacy studies better conceptualize how and what learners exchange and negotiate within learning environments. In one final example, I turn to Morris Young’s work, which begins to blend historical scholarship on literacy sponsors while still centering literacy learners to recreate the rich context and history around literacy learning in the territory of Hawaii during the early twentieth century. More specifically, Young’s work highlights “underlying … anxiety about race and the ‘Oriental’ influence” around Asian immigrants who came to the US territory to work on sugar plantations through an exploration of plantation and Standard English schools that segregated students in the 1920’s nominally by language skills but in practice by race
Using narratives in fiction writing to access the experiences of literacy learners navigating these educational programs, Young illustrates not only how literacy campaigns were constructed around racist and nationalist ideologies but also the impact of these ideologies on learners and their own sense of identity. While Young’s work brings together sources including surveys from the US Bureau of Education and the writings of other governmental officials and educators to weave a portrait of the motivations of literacy sponsors in creating literacy programs, I suggest that we continue to enrich our scholarship through more in-depth work on sponsors to explore the ideologies and anxieties that inform decisions about literacy distribution.

If literacy learning is an exchange, it represents a relationship that is always exploitative in capitalist economic structures, though multidimensional as well (Tong 96). This multidimensionality comes as sponsorship results in “more democratic access to learning” and “tools for stratification and denial of opportunity” (Brandt Literacy 2); learners have much to gain but we cannot ignore the ways uneven literacy distribution often re-inscribes social (and economic) class (Stuckey 105-106, 108-109, 118-119). As we understand the position of literacy learners as a complex one within this exchange, there is still work to do to better understand the motives of sponsors of literacy, including both those at institutional levels and individual teachers.

I suggest that studying literacy sponsors in the New South allows us to see literacies, economy, and aspects of social identity as they intersected through the circulation of different kinds of capital during a moment in US Industrialization. The mill industry in the New South offers a rich site to house these explorations because the ways workers were constructed as they moved from a primarily agrarian to industrial economy.
directly impacted how literacy sponsors conceptualized the transmission of literacy, especially for rural white women. By contextualizing the particular sponsorship relationship that developed between cotton mills, welfare workers, and their Appalachian women, we can look closer at how literacy campaigns functioned amongst the ideologies of capitalist development, white supremacy, and paternalism to situate literacy learning as one element of the process to civilize and modernize the Anglo-Saxon Appalachian. Historical distance allows us to see these intersections more clearly to make transparent how literacy campaigns bolstered key moments as capitalist development took hold in the southern states following Reconstruction.

Mill villages open the door to a unique moment in American history when the paternalism of white, upper-class, male entrepreneurs,⁴ sought to create contained, unincorporated spaces to attract, maintain, and control (white) industrial laborers. The region’s cotton mills were called “the last great stand of a defeated people to come back to a place in the sun” (16-17) in a speech to the Conference of Southern Textile Social Service Association: “a divine institution” to bring rural whites “to the light from barren places … that people might find themselves and be found” (Speake qtd in MacDonald 17). The social structure in model mill villages in the Carolinas during this period offers a unique moment to turn conversations in literacy studies to focus more directly on literacy sponsors, as company towns were owned and operated by the factories they served; it was these same factories that spearheaded learning programs within these intentional spaces. This project picks up on a crucial moment in the formation of the New South as large numbers of rural whites entered unincorporated living spaces where the drive for

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⁴ It is important to note here that while mill owners were to my knowledge always white and male, some hailed from Northern states, while others were from Southern states; and the money to start some mills was collectively raised by Southern communities where they were later built (Tullos 146, Herring).
industrial efficiency came into direct contact with the public and private lives of workers. I examined how literacies were constructed within some of these industrial “utopias” (Aria and Smith 8) to highlight how learning campaigns, socially ascribed identities, and the circulation of capital are all necessary elements in the study of sponsorship. To do this, I called upon archived documents produced by sponsors in conversation with primary and secondary sources that help us understand the complex motivations behind sponsorship in these spaces and the way literacies were thought to function within the mill village to improve the lives of Appalachian women while further embedding their experiences in methods of capitalist (re)production.

**Materialist Feminism: A Theoretical Lens for Studying Literacy Sponsorship**

Scholars in Literacy Studies have begun to ask not only what is gained by literacy learning, but also what is lost, emphasizing the sacrifices sometimes made within the lives of literacy learners when they take on new literacy practices (Donehower, Locklear, Sohn). For example, researchers like Katherine Kelleher Sohn illustrate how the home lives of Appalachian female college students changed, often drastically, after they received their degrees (22-28, see also Gere 277 and Locklear). Using the historical site of southern mill villages from 1880-1920, I develop a materialist feminist lens for understanding literacy sponsorship, opening avenues to consider the frameworks of capital that surround literacy sponsorship campaigns in the southern mill village. This theoretical orientation allows us to explore the presence and absence of different forms of capital in the move from “barren places” to light and the role of literacy sponsorship in circulating and accumulating these forms for mill owners, welfare workers, and laborers (Speake qtd. in MacDonald 17). It also allows us to explore campaigns in a “bounded”
space while recognizing the social nature of these boundaries: while mill villages were constructed as fairly isolated units—and in some ways were—their social and economic structures were absolutely tied to larger national and international trends in global the textile industry, US and southern industrialization, and the formation and exploitation of the Appalachian region. By focusing on campaigns explicitly targeting women, I offer examples of how literacy distribution accounted for hegemonic constructions of identity (the woman mill worker) as sponsors determined who got access to what kinds of resources.

The complex socio-historical context for studying literacy campaigns in Carolina “model” mill villages seems to lead almost organically to questions considering how institutionally sponsored educational programs were impacted by, and thought to impact, the development of industrial and consumer capitalist economies in the south. Owners of industry constructed the buildings within company towns in ways mirrored by the intentional nature of the social programs that happened within them. Therefore company towns were not only structures to simply physically house workers and their families; they were used to increase worker retention, attract a higher quality of workers and win them over in competition with other regional mills, while serving social functions by providing educational and leisure amenities to people associated with the industry (Parker “The South Carolina Mill Village” 3). When discussing mill villages, then, we conjure pictures of compounds in which centralized leadership tried to meet the needs of workers within a defined, though often unincorporated, town-space.

I believe studying literacy campaigns in southern company towns offers an example of the ways in which literacy studies might further combine how we understand
sponsorship within capitalist economics with the need for a more materialist feminist approach to our work. Materialist feminism utilizes two threads of theoretical thought as valuable sites for research: materialism, which calls upon classical Marxist conceptions of capitalist economies and their relationship to the (re)production of the social world; and the intervention of feminist theories and methodologies, which forefront the daily, lived experiences of women. In combining these two orientations, scholars including Rosemary Hennessy, Teresa Ebert, and transnational feminists Chandra Mohanty, Chizu Sato, and Vandana Shiva, among others, have done tremendous work to bring to light the ways capitalism (within the United States and abroad) impacts the lives of women as producers, consumers, and investors. Thus, materialist feminism highlights the economic ties that connect women across the globe but which make us invisible to each other. As the theory begins where multiple socially ascribed and materially experienced identities meet, materialist feminism also recognizes intersectionality, as “class performance is shaped by factors other than class” (Bettie 192).

While in fact there are many ways of understanding “materialism,” my own layered conception, answers the:

call for a critique that would explain the ‘social constructedness, historical causes, and political situationality of bodies,’ and that does not ‘erase the ‘real’ historical material specificity of bodies: the materiality constituted not by abstract, pure (ontological or textual) difference, but the historical struggles over the relations of production’ (selections from Ebert qtd in Hollis 49).

To accomplish this, I rely heavily on the theoretical work of Hennessy and historical materialist Immanuel Wallerstein to emphasize the economic, political, and social
positioning of women who have historically been pivotal to the development and implementation of the capitalist system, but who are often invisible within it. As I understand it, a materialist lens insists that we remain rooted in the social process of meeting human needs as the base-line for theoretical work, acknowledging that the social process of producing and allocating resources under capitalism (methods of production/reproduction) results in the uneven distribution of assets based on social constructions of difference (Hennessy *Profit* 32, see also Tong 95, 105-106).

Materialist feminism additionally highlights the unacknowledged role of women’s often-unpaid labor in domestic spaces, both in terms of reproducing labor power through caring for domestic needs and in the reproduction of social identities. To further tease out the significance of women’s traditional positions as keepers of the domestic sphere in US society and in societies around the globe, Wallerstein points out that:

low wages are in fact only possible because the wage earners are located in household structures for which lifetime wage-income provides only a relatively small proportion of total household income. Such households require the extensive input of labour into so-called subsistence and petty market activities—in part by the adult male to be sure, but in much larger part by the adult female, plus the young and the aged of both sexes. (“Ideological Tensions” 34)

This structuring of the household frames “women—and the young and the aged—to work to create surplus-value for the owners of capital, who do not even pay them a little bit … by proclaiming that their work is really non-work” (Wallerstein “Ideological Tensions” 35). Materialist feminist theory seeks to better understand how this invisible labor furthers the economic interests of those already investing capital, while also seeking resistance within
these spaces of exploitation. My project displays how company towns in the cotton mill south offer a ripe setting for materialist feminist work to explore how mill amenities including corporate-sponsored literacies might be considered part of the “total household income” by providing residents with forms of capital beyond the economic. This analysis is done through the examination of literacy sponsorship campaigns and examination of the sponsors—both owners of industry and charitable reform workers—whose efforts to impact both worker productivity and social class transformed mill villages into a nexus where public and private spheres come into direct conversation.

Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsorship is therefore central to constructing a materialist feminist view of literacy learning, development, and usage (Literacy 6-7). Although Brandt does not directly align her understanding of literacies with materialist or materialist feminist theory, the articulation of literacy sponsorship as an exchange in which both the learner and the (individual or institutional) sponsor stand the potential to gain or lose capital, highlights the intersection of “individual literacy development in relation to the large-scale economic forces that set the routes and determine the worldly worth of that literacy” (Literacy 5, 18). Brandt’s work on literacy sponsorship in the lives of a large and diverse population of literacy learners sheds light on human relationships, ideological pressures, and the materiality of literacy to question how access to some literacies—or lack thereof—necessarily takes on an economic component. Her work covers large stretches of ground, uniting literacies and economy around the constructions of “consumer desire,” the “integration[on] of corporate markets ... [and] the deployment of weapons and other technology,” and the function of literacies as “raw material[s] in the mass production of information” (Literacy 18). In contrast with Brandt, I suggest a shift
in focus to investigate how literacy *sponsors* (Brandt looks primarily at the *sponsored*) and their motivations for making literacies accessible to certain populations will broaden conversations within the field. In this way, we might continue to explore what is gained or lost when one encounters a new literacy in addition to considering the agents and agencies investing in these encounters and what they hoped to gain from the campaigns they ran.

Alongside sponsorship, then, the idea of investment further enriches a materialist view as it outlines how literacies and literacy transmission are avenues through which capital is created, circulated, and accumulated. If we are looking at literacy distribution as it occurred through the exchange of sponsorship within the context of southern mill villages, it is helpful to consider the ways sponsors invested capital in the campaigns they ran. According to Pierre Bourdieu, capital is at its basic level the result of labor, which manifests in different ways in a capitalist economy: economic, cultural, and social (“The Forms” 91). Economic capital, likely the best recognized of the three, is most simply as cash or property and carries monetary value.

Cultural capital is perhaps the form most immediately identified with acquisition of literacies and can be understood as socially recognized and valued ways of knowing. In this way, cultural capital may appear as one’s knowledge of a certain subject matter, for example, or in the ability to read a book to further research and articulate an idea. Bourdieu further recognizes that cultural capital takes on three forms: “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” or knowledge, objectified goods, and institutionalized qualifications that signify educational achievements (“The Forms” 84). These distinctions indicate that we might imagine cultural capital as necessary for an owner of production to
“appropriate … and use [methods of production] in accordance with their specific purpose … either in person or by proxy”; economic capital may purchase machinery, but investments of cultural capital are required to run them (“The Forms” 87).

The final form of capital is social capital, defined as group membership or prestige that locates one within a social hierarchy. While social capital is frequently associated with one’s economic resources, as we will see in the following chapters, it also indicates compliance with particular behavioral norms that reflect a higher social (though not necessarily economic) class. Further, Bourdieu reminds us that there is something “directly usable” that results from these social relations, which are “endlessly reproduced in and through the exchange (of gifts, words, women, etc) which it encourages and which presupposes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition” (“The Forms” 89). This constant exchange and reproduction of group parameters confirms who receives the benefits of membership and who does not.

To build on Bourdieu’s perspective, Wallerstein’s understanding of literacy and more generally language-use in the formation of “pastness” and “peoplehood” broadens our discussion of cultural and social capital and identity in productive ways. In particular, group identity (peoplehood), which expresses social capital according to how group identities are “ranked” in larger concepts of social space (within a region, nation-state, or globally), relies at least in part on the construction of a collective history of individuals, or pastness, which we may consider cultural capital. Knowledge of this history is “a central element in the socialization of individuals, in the maintenance of group solidarity, [and] in the establishment of or challenge to social legitimation” (“The Construction” 78). In defining pastness as such, it becomes:
a moral phenomenon, … a political phenomenon, [and] always a contemporary phenomenon,” changing in response to shifts in political, social, and economic paradigms and regimes. Thus, pastness must maintain the impression of constancy in order to preserve its effectiveness as a source of legitimization. (Wallerstein “The Construction” 78)

This often occurs through literacy events and the perpetuations of a consistent “origin story” of social development amongst a particular group of people (Balibar 87, see also Donehower “Reconsidering” 101-103).

These forms of capital help us consider the broader investments made by literacy sponsors in educational programs, the kinds of returns they expected on these investments, and how literacy learning and other amenities that constituted some welfare work programs contributed to the “total household incomes” referenced by Wallerstein to compensate for the industry’s low wages. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the association between literacy learning and the “civilizing” of marginalized people has been well documented in work by Goodburn, Donehower, and Locklear, among others. This strong belief that educational programs socialized and normalized individuals and groups into mainstream culture (as opposed to literacy as a source for entertainment, for example) links the labor of learning, developing, and utilizing schooled literacies during this period with creating, circulating, and accumulating social and cultural capital through the intellectual and moral “uplift” of women, children, and men. Although economic uplift was also a part of these cultural narratives, changes in economic status were more frequently impacted by one’s access to other social resources and not merely the result of formal literacy learning (see Graff’s analysis of the “literacy
myth”). Educational programs did give people access to cultural ways of knowing (cultural capital) and allowed them to express these ways through different kinds of group and class identity (social capital) that may not have been previously available. Thus, as literacy learning in southern mill villages conveyed concrete skills to rural white women, its embeddedness in larger welfare work programs emphasizes that for literacy sponsors these skills cannot be separated from the cultural and social capital that accompanied social reform programs.

This interconnectedness between literacy learning and capital indicates why studying this particular moment in time (1880-1920) using a materialist feminist lens offers such rich results: it allows us to clearly trace the logic of capitalist development through literacy distribution and exchange to better comprehend how schooled literacies both opened opportunities for mill women and positioned them within hegemonic social space. The accumulation of social and cultural capital in the lives of mill women obscures the economic exploitation and poverty many experienced at the hands of the industry. Amongst these claims, it is important to be clear that the impact of these larger structural movements on the lives of individual women and their families were not absolute. The rhetoric and ideologies of charitable work and Christian love were very strong in the approaches of literacy sponsors, particularly from welfare workers affiliated with religious organizations like the YWCA. One of the dangers of using a materialist feminist lens to understand people’s lives in a community is that it is easy to lose some of the complex threads that contribute to how communities function. For example, in this project I do not fully engage with the ways Christian rhetoric of charity might also be considered a powerful sponsor affecting women’s lives and literacy decisions. For this
reason, studying more closely the writing of literacy sponsors themselves complicates the ways capitalist ideologies circulated on the mill hill, gesturing towards the logic of accumulation while helping us consider the multiple ways this logic manifests and how it may have brought comfort even as it enfolded workers into industrial systems of production.

To incorporate a fuller definition of capital is to embed studies of literacy sponsorship more comprehensibly into developments in capitalist economies. Although literacy learning is well understood to impact and even complicate notions of identity (Hogg, Cintron, Beech, and LeCourt offer examples), the way these identities are intertwined with economic pressures and the uneven distribution of capital and other resources are seldom delineated (one strong exception is found in Stuckey’s *The Violence of Literacy*). Literacy campaigns within southern mill villages require us to recognize that educational movements targeted specific populations of rural whites, who were often rhetorically constructed by sponsors to justify patterns for the distribution of capital. This distribution privileged white identities and illustrated a concern for the normalization of domestic space as a center for the reproduction of ethnicity and the labor force (socially and materially).

**Tell it from the Mountain: Industry and the Impact of Peoplehood and Pastness in Constructing Appalachia and the Mill Hill**

One reason the Appalachian region is so interesting for studies of literacy distribution is because its conceptualization as a distinct geographic place—and more importantly social space—is heavily tied to the movement of texts beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. These texts, which proved popular amongst the increasingly literate
white middle class, were instrumental in circulating particular stereotypes of the region, many of which are still conjured today. Thus, the perceived and constructed geographical and social isolation of people living in the mountains as depicted discursively and visually by travel writers and local colorists, perpetuated reports of poverty, illiteracy, and primitive living in texts that captured the imaginations of mainstream US culture (Mortensen “Representations” 106). This was in part due to the combination of, identification with, and distinctions made between rural Appalachian whites and the consumer culture that made up this much of audience (Shapiro xi).

The formation of the region, then, was less about regional identity, per say, and more about articulating class distinctions amongst people identified racially as white, as textual accounts erased racial and ethnic diversity in the region (Dunaway Women 3, 125-125). In examining intersections between the Appalachian mountaineer and the “lint head,”5 I want to highlight how common ancestry (pastness) positioned mill women within a particular ideological space that was taken up by literacy sponsors to justify their work. For this reason, it is essential to understand the construction of the mountaineer as an “Anglo-Saxon” identity as a major factor in erasing the rural ways of life that were devalued during the entrance of extractive industries and industrialization of the South. In addition, the incorporation of this identity and the capital (or lack thereof) it brought to mill literacy campaigns emphasize that identity cannot be just a discursive or affective sense of self. Identities like those written on the southern mountaineer impacted people’s access to resources; it also illustrated how the formation of peoplehood was historically folded into capitalist methods of production, a topic to which I return in Chapter 3.

5 “Lint head” is a term historically used in derogatory ways to describe southern mill workers.
During the late-nineteenth century, large numbers of white women and their families from struggling rural and Appalachian farms shifted into industrial labor, or “public work,” moving to the cotton mills of the Carolina Piedmont. While John C. Campbell estimated in 1913 that only a relatively small proportion of the mountain and mill populations overlapped (“From Mountain” 9-10), Appalachians were frequently recognized in mill studies as a steady source of labor in addition to other rural agricultural communities in the southern states (for historical references, see MacDonald, Dawley, Lemert; for contemporary references, see Hall et al and Carlton). Depictions of both mountain and mill populations in mass-circulating texts during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries indicate that mill village life, industrial labor, and participation in consumer capitalism were framed as methods for introducing backwards mountain-dwellers into modern society. Henry Shapiro suggests this argument was increasingly made after 1907 in relation to supporting child labor in the industry (164-181). Thus, it fell upon company towns to amend the “savage” ways of “the shrunken, tobacco-juiced, whiskey-steeped old cabin dweller” (adult and child) depicted in popular culture (Dawley The Child 408).

“Mountaineers” of the nineteenth century were consistently identified and classed by descriptions of impoverished lifestyles and deficit; simultaneously they were raced as “Anglo-Saxon,” having the same noble genetics as the founding fathers of the United States as well as contemporary national icons like Abraham Lincoln (Harney 48, Frost 105). The purity of colonial bloodlines was valorized by these portrayals, pointing to the mountaineer’s “latent talent,” not yet fully developed (Frost 105, see also Caldwell 219).

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6 It is also significant to remember that the “textile crescent” where most southern mills were located included several counties in the Appalachian region as well as the adjoining Piedmont. Thus, the number of workers hailing from the mountains likely varied greatly depending on the mill and its location.
This latent talent is crucial to my interest in this time and place; it is the potential of (white) mountain populations that made them targets for normalizing campaigns structured by mill welfare work. Further, this potential highlights how identities acted intersectionally in the mill village: the racial makeup of workers counterbalanced their lower social class.

A fundamental belief that the biological characteristics of whiteness could be cultivated in workers through the proper social infrastructure, roots the industry in the racist ideologies of the post-Reconstruction South. While I go into more depth in Chapter 3 to thread together white identity with the southern cotton mill industry, it is significant to note here that the major reconfiguring of black identity that also took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically, Reconstruction, which lasted between 1865-1877, brought a period of enfranchisement for African Americans, many of who were newly emancipated from US slavery. Most notably this period includes the passing of the fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1869 that acknowledged universal suffrage for men of all races. Increased social and economic opportunity for African Americans was tempered, and in many cases essentially retracted, by racially motivated violence, escalating after the Compromise of 1876 that withdrew remaining Union troops from the South.

Many of the Jim Crow laws passed in southern states during the late nineteenth century centered on restricting the mobility of African Americans, beginning with the segregation of transportation and education to separate white and black populations. These practices of segregation were bolstered by the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson that ruled “‘separate’ facilities for blacks and whites were
constitutional as long as they were ‘equal’” (“Plessy”). The infamous “separate but equal” ruling legitimized racial segregation in many southern cotton mill villages as well as in school systems and most public spaces in the south and around the US, with facilities designated for African American and black populations seldom, if ever, “equal” to those for whites.

While these constructions of blackness and segregation are often absent from the archival artifacts that make up this project, the emphasis of Jim Crow laws in restricting the public mobility and sites for social transition for blacks juxtaposes the emphasis on literacy learning within mill villages as uplifting rural whites. Thus, the positioning of the mountaineer as white—and in particular as Anglo-Saxon—has very specific social and political implications tied to larger responses to social change in the US around the turn of the century. Further, the social disruptions in the south resulting from the dissolution of a mainstream economy that relied on the free labor of enslaved women, men, and children impacted the bodies available in the paid labor force and how those bodies contributed to production (Engerman 21). Specifically, in relation to southern cotton mills, Ben Lemert analyzes the meeting of wage labor, capitalism, and the (re)production of racial identity in 1933, framing the labor of African American men and women as “the untried potentiality of a great black labor force [that] looms like a threatening cloud in the background” of mill work (64).

The recognition of what Marx calls “a disposable industrial reserve army, constituting a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interests of capital's own changing valorization requirements” (784, see as well Lemert 8, 58, 64), illustrates how surplus labor and segregation enabled exploitative working
conditions. This is especially interesting in the case of peoplehood in the mill village, as methods of production depended on the primarily black labor in the surrounding cotton fields (Thompson 5-6). Within most mill villages, though, where industry proclaimed a role in social as well as economic development of workers, identities were centered on a shared whiteness between sponsors and workers. The emphasis on race solidified boundaries between working class whites and blacks, reflecting institutional racism through the segregation of the workforce and the positioning of the southern mill industry as uplifting poor rural whites through paid labor and educational opportunities.

Emphasis on the “backwards” and frontier ways in the construction of mountaineer peoplehood illustrates how ideologies accompanying capitalist progression devalued populations and practices that did not fit into industrial consumer culture. This devaluation included the multiple economies and traditions of meeting needs through kinship networks exhibited in many rural communities, which co-existed alongside and provided alternatives to capitalist methods of production and the accumulation of capital that pushes this kind of economic development. Thus, while certain nostalgia clouded depictions of some aspects of life in the mountains, the rural methods for meeting needs described there were often cast in a negative light.

One of the best illustrations of the complex social position built around the white mountaineer is in William Harney’s 1873 essay, “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People.” Originally appearing in *Lippincott's Magazine*, this piece is typical of the travel-writing genre in the exotic and bucolic depictions of the landscape the Northern traveler encounters on his journeys through the Southern Mountains and his observations of the odd people living there (46-49). The essay opens as the author draws a comparison
between “the incidents of this sketch … journeying over the mountains in the autumn of 1869” and “a nodule of amygdaloid” that Harney refuses to break open, as “it is an index to a chapter of life” in its course state; a preserved artifact untouched by the eras that have passed it by (46). Harney goes on to explain a handful of folk practices of the Appalachians, including planting by the moon and the identification of mineral veins by “the water-wizard and his forked wand,” all of which he classifies as “pure, unadulterated humbug,” pointing out that “by shooting arrows all day, even a blind man may hit the mark sometimes” (48–49). The dismissal of traditional farming methods illustrates the devaluation of subsistence knowledge by middle-class worldviews, representing a response to rural literacies that sought to strip them of their legitimacy by framing them as superstition instead of based on generations of experience. Though the land is praised as beautiful, even “home-like”—and mineral-rich—the people are ruled by primitive beliefs, living undisturbed, as they had for generations, inside their own fossilized amygdaloid, isolated by immobile rock.

Much recent work within the field of Appalachian Studies points out that accounts like Harney’s hid from readers (who were typically located outside the region) the actual classed, raced, and gendered lives of Appalachians; and erased the presence of Native Americans, African Americans, and other populations. It also ignored socio-economic stratification, and the labor of women, both in the home and in formal marketplaces (Dunaway, Banks, Anglin, and Waller). During the latter half of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth when this essay circulated, advancing technology made the consumption of books and other print materials possible for large numbers of people who held a nostalgia for the seventeenth-century frontier region of the United
States, later coined Appalachia (Plein 101-102). Stewart Plein claims that not only did the written content of books contribute to the construction of the region and those living in it, but book covers designed specifically to draw in audiences and sell products provided visual images of the stereotypes and stock characters that made up much local color writing. Publishers “borrow[ed the] imagery superimposed upon Appalachia and us[ed] pre-existing images” instead of actual experiences, further embedding the impressions of the region generated by “outsiders” (102, 112). Thus, we see an historical kairos combining “a growing [US] population that was educated, with the leisure time to read, and the discretionary income to purchase books, as well as the advancement of distribution-delivery systems as freight conveyed by railroads and river barges” to circulate reading materials (Plein 106). This context was bolstered by a nation recently torn by civil war, grasping to form a sense of identity by looking towards its pastness through the creation of the Appalachian region and the mountaineer (Shapiro xi). Thus, the mountaineer served as both a cultural signifier of US history to bring the North and South together through common white ancestry and as a touchstone for how far the nation had come and the positive impacts of modern technologies and manufacturing.

Differentiating the Appalachian region and people from the rest of the United States explained away the “otherness” that writers found in places relatively untouched by the rising consumption-based culture developing in American urban centers (Shapiro 65, 116, 119 and Eller 43, 171). Historical research on the region emphasizes that many Appalachian communities were not, in fact, the “self-sufficient and egalitarian yeoman communities” portrayed in these texts, but had a “range of class fractions and racial identities” as “individual households assumed different relationships to petty commodity
production, agriculture, and merchant capitalism” (Dunaway *Women, Power, and Dissent* 5). But these depictions of Appalachians as trapped in colonial times (Fox Jr 143-144, Frost 92) peaked the interest of readers across the nation. The mountaineer was a living embodiment of white America’s idealized pastness and the “backwardness” associated with rural mountain life served to buttress capitalist progression to improve lives and communities. Thus, constructions of difference based on “culture” steered conversations concerning the region away from the nation-wide processes of uneven industrialization responsible for increased disparities and a growing sense of class stratification in the United States. The “mountain cabins” and “tenant shacks” from which the mountaineer hailed represented a life of poverty ameliorated by company towns (Lemert 70), even as industrial labor may not have resulted in drastic changes in economic capital for many families. Portrayals of Appalachia and the people living there as backwards and in dire poverty, then, might be seen as a rhetorical and ideological move taken up by industries that depended on the cheap labor rural whites provided and the raw materials in the land where they lived.

The following “checklist,” generated by Todd Snyder to critique these constructions historically and as they still circulate today, illustrates some of the common features used to identify Appalachians by travel writers and local colorists:

1) Lawless aggression
2) Clannish family behavioral patterns
3) Moonshine [production and consumption of illegally produced corn whiskey]
4) Questionable hygiene
5) Disparaged dialects
6) Illiterate [and generally ignorant] families

7) Defeminized women [alongside accounts of “mountain beauties”]\(^7\)

8) Connection to the land

9) Pioneer spirit (rugged individualism)

10) Lack of respect or regard for modern society. (Snyder)

To this list, I might also add sexually promiscuous (particularly in regards to women) (Dawley, Estabrook and McDougle), lazy and uninterested in work (Dawley), and living in extreme poverty as illustrated in the popular image of Appalachians so desperate for food as to eat the clay used to keep their log cabins together (Anglin, Dawley, see Campbell’s discussion of hookworm “From Mountain” 6-7). The first two on Snyder’s list are most notably addressed as overblown stereotypes by Altina Waller in her study of the infamous feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys in West Virginia and Kentucky at the end of the nineteenth century and the texts surrounding it. Other characteristics, including questionable hygiene (and housekeeping) and rugged individualism are referenced in a variety of accounts from the time period, including government-funded expositions (Dawley, Lemert) and academic studies from eugenicists and social scientists (Estabrook and McDougle). Examining constructions of Appalachia beginning in the mid to late nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the alternative paths of economic and social development found there were understood as less valuable than the consumer capitalism of mainstream US communities (including systems of barter and subsistence). This devaluation positioned industrial and consumer capitalism as the naturalized “next

\(^7\) See examples in Fox Jr, Frost, and Allen.
step” in the evolution of the region, setting the stage for welfare work by organizations like the YWCA, that this project focuses upon.

While welfare work targeted rural whites within company towns, the depictions outlined here resulted in an influx of “cultural workers” to the mountain region itself, with similar goals of uplifting rural whites. Whisnant, among other scholars of Appalachia, points out that in trying to “preserve” the unique folkways of the region, these workers typically exploited aspects of mountain culture: “by directing attention away from dominant structural realities, such as those associated with colonial subjugation or resource exploitation or class-based inequalities, ‘culture’ provides a mask for other [economic] agendas of change and throws a warm glow upon the cold realities of social distortion” (Whisnant 260, see also Dunn 256). Interestingly, cultural preservation and education efforts were frequently tied to industry, as the famous Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky received over half its endowment in the early twentieth century—76%—from the coal industry (Whisnant 73-78). Therefore, discursive and visual (re)presentations of mountain life highlighted differences and devalued lifestyles perceived as a threat to developers’ access to and extraction of resources in the region; this encouraged a focus on the constructed “culture of poverty,” making invisible the often devastating impact of industrialization on mountain communities.8

Gender and Literacies at the Turn of the Century

The literacy campaigns I present in this project exist within larger social and cultural conceptions of gender that while complicated and layered, typically positioned white women as household buyers and as the epicenter of morality for their families. This

8 It is significant to note that not all of the Appalachian region, from northern Alabama to New York, was impacted by industrialization in the same ways.
is evidenced as campaigns headed by groups like the Young Women’s Christian Association (see Chapter 4) emphasized a multi-dimensional approach to their work with women in mill villages to include attention to the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the community. For example, in the Annual Report for 1904 from the YWCA’s American Committee, the following amenities are referenced in relation to welfare work in Monaghan Mills of Greenville, SC: “religious meetings, Bible classes, social features, club work and thorough instruction in domestic science and art” (*A Year's Work, 1904* 12). Further, references to night schools, reading rooms, and libraries give us a stronger understanding of the material culture related to these campaigns, which not only encompassed classes in reading and writing, but also provided women with physical spaces where reading materials were located along with chairs, lamps, and tables to encourage study (Penfield 13, *Open Letters* 4, 15, “Library and Reading Room 1904”).
The material culture around literacy campaigns also reflected changing attitudes towards women that marked the years between 1880 and 1920 to make this period one rich for studying literacy sponsorship. As my work examines industry and charitable investments in the education of white women in mill villages, it allows us to consider how literacies were utilized to access new buyer markets in a growing consumer culture amongst the move towards greater liberation for some women in the public sphere. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women were regularly positioned as household consumers by the booming US advertising industries, which began targeting middle and upper class women in mass-circulating magazines and
newspapers (Hennessy Profit 98-99). As these women became a new market for commodity consumption, so did women in rural areas (and working women), as companies like Larkin, Comfort, and Sears and Roebuck branched out to a wide variety of communities offering goods like soap, kitchen appliances, clothing, and even services like insurance to meet material and affectual needs of readers (Hennessy Profit 84, 217, see also Donehower “Reconsidering” 103-104). Within this context, we see a dialectical relationship between the explicit targeting of women by literacy sponsors and growing buyer markets that further embedded women in larger cycles of the circulation of capital: economic, social, and cultural. This market growth crystallized aspects of national gender identities in many communities that both reproduced social standards and class habitus across the nation while they “helped to broaden women's sphere by catering to the woman's role as consumer and moving her activity outward from the home to include shopping” (Damon-Moore and Kaestle Gender as an Organizing Force 4).

As changing consumer roles bridged the gap between “public” and “private” spheres in the lives of some women, national movements for women’s suffrage also gained strength during the years of this study, culminating in the 1920 passage of the nineteenth amendment to the US Constitution, giving women the right to vote in federal elections. Although little on the suffragette movement is referenced in the archival documents I examine in this project, it is important to acknowledge because of the ways in which it tied the roles of women to the morality of the nation as well as increased opportunities to work outside of the domestic sphere, particularly for white women of
means. While the suffragettes may not have been explicitly present in the archival materials I work with, both workingwomen and the benevolent workers within the mill village almost undoubtedly felt their influence. The YWCA, for example, which sponsored much of the mill welfare work for women discussed in this project, was involved in the Suffrage movement in the Carolinas, as indicated in the Central North Carolina’s branch history (“history”).

The Association’s national materials articulate the perception that women’s moral influence over the home had a positive influence on the public sphere in multiple publications, including Margaret Sangster’s “The Present Opportunity of the Christian Woman,” presented between 1892 and 1901. The document thus outlines the responsibilities of the Christian woman: to God, to society, and to the home. It is the duty towards society that is more interesting here, as Sangster draws on a parallel between young women in college YWCA branches and Union soldiers, stating:

[they] seem to me very much like the camps with their circles of light which I used to see long ago in the days of the war when traveling on Southern roads where our armies were intrenched. Here and there, amid the darkness, the beacon lights would gleam from among the trees, and I would know that around the camp-fires the boys in blue were waiting the signal to march or to fight as duty might call them to do. So in Chicago’s Nineteenth ward and in our own crowded tenement neighborhoods in New York and elsewhere, our Christian women in Christlike fashion go and found homes among the lowly, live and love and labor as the Master did among the poor and the obscure. (5)

9 Wilma Dunaway points out that women of color and working class white women were employed in a variety of paid (or forced) labor long before the rise of “public work” in the nineteenth century (Women, Work, and Family 6-7, 53-54, 57-58).
Further, Sangster articulates the belief that “Men seldom rise higher than the ethical standard demanded of them by the women of their own families and the women who they love,” arguing that women’s education and engagement with social ideas contributed to the larger morality of the nation (men) through the domestic space (7).

This framing of women as the moral compass for the household supported arguments for women’s literacy learning that also surface in the genre of domestic literacy narratives, examined by Sarah Robbins in Managing Literacy, Mothering America. The middle class (white) emphasis on the role of the mother and women in literacy acquisition, exhibited in the ideological link between literacy learning (“reading, writing, and oral language acquisition”) and the “public behavior” of sons and to a lesser extent daughters, whose choices would have an impact on national affairs (Robbins 5). As we will see in the chapters that follow, these classed, raced, and gendered perspectives were brought into educational campaigns like those in mill villages by mill owners as well as welfare workers, emphasizing the larger social significance of welfare work and the literacy classes welfare workers provided for mill women.

Mill owners cited the march of capitalist progression as justification for mill villages and the social and manufacturing work that happened there. As I have suggested above, the focus on “fixable” cultural attributes of mill women and their families both made opaque the steps that attributed to this progression and made invisible the ways “capitalism writes its script” onto “the bodies and lives of women and girls” through changes in material conditions and habitus (Mohanty 235-236). As the following chapters illustrate, the writing of this script on the mill hill took place in both subtle and overt ways, as women’s appearances, domestic and paid labor practices, and household spaces
were re-conceptualized by literacy sponsors, who encouraged them to embody principles like efficiency and neatness to exhibit their latent Anglo-Saxon potential. Thus, these campaigns highlighted a nexus of gender, race, and class in socially engineered company towns.

**Conclusion**

While a variety of fields have examined the contributions of welfare work to Industrialization in the US, relatively few studies of company-sponsored support for employees have appeared within Composition and Rhetoric. This oversight is particularly egregious when we consider that the phenomenon often centered around the processes of teaching new literacies (both alphabetic and social) to workers who flocked to company towns for paid labor during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In exploring this particular history of literacy sponsorship, I turn to archival documents that reconstruct the southern mill industry and the welfare work instituted in some model mill villages to capture the voices of sponsors, and in rare cases, the women they taught. This turn allows me to build on previous research and return to original documents to read them from a different perspective.

In Chapter 2, I begin by laying out the methods and methodologies of my archival work. In tracing the processes of my research, I build upon the materialist feminist methodologies and practices introduced here to theorize how researchers might navigate around spaces of absence in archived material in historical recovery work. This is especially significant in regards to studies of mill women, for whom little archival artifacts remain intact for the period following Reconstruction.
Chapter 3 brings archival evidence in conversation with other primary and secondary texts, looking explicitly at the writing of the first layer of literacy sponsors: mill owners and administrators. These men served primarily as economic literacy sponsors for workers in their factories and living in their villages, investing cash in programs to teach reading, writing, and other skills to women and their families, newly arrived from rural areas. My focus on economic sponsors responds to Barbara Ellen Smith’s call to “follow the money” in relation to the destruction and re-construction of communities in Appalachia, working outward to consider “what other local places and larger relations of power [it may] lead us [towards]” (Smith qtd in Anglin “Moving Forward” 286).

Chapter 4 turns towards literacy sponsorship on the level of the female welfare workers that taught literacy classes within the mill village. This shift grants us access to the writings of female teachers whose work responded to the constructions of the Appalachian region and rural white poverty produced by local color and travel writers, allowing us to access in very direct ways how literacy learning campaigns were thought to address the process of acculturation experienced by many mill workers during the construction of the New South. In my analysis, I draw heavily on the archived papers of the YWCA and Cone Mills to acknowledge the gendered nature of these literacy campaigns and benevolent work within industrial spaces, which strongly connect to Protestant religious beliefs and social space. This chapter also emphasizes literacy campaigns as a means for creating social and cultural capital within the social spaces of the mill hill.
Finally, in Chapter 5, my study addresses female literacy learners in model mill villages. Although this layer of analysis is the most difficult to access in this project, I reference a variety of texts including scraps of worker writing, company newspapers, and oral histories to trace the evolution of how workers were represented during the years of my project, as well as to interrogate ways in which they began to represent themselves. These texts allow us to build possibilities in considering how textual artifacts circulated within mill villages and impacted the lives of some woman, even as resources to do so are scarce. Within this last chapter I seek paths of resistance in the everyday textualities of workers to speak back, even if only in glimpses, to the sponsors of the pages that come before, to further complicate this portrait and consider how literacies may have been taken up on the mill hill in diverse ways.

The archived writings of literacy sponsors in southern mill villages construct a very specific view of literacy learning and how reading and writing impacted groups and individuals, with particular attention to the circulation of different forms of capital. My research attempts to historicize and contextualize this view to better understand not only the motivations sponsors held for their role in distributing literacies in the New South, but also how these distributions contributed to the industrialization of the region and the formation of peoplehood and social space amongst the agents involved. This intersectional work highlights the complex tapestry of women’s identities, and the ways that literacy learning and economy are inextricably tied to these socially ascribed positions and to the methods of production in the cotton mill industry.
CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

As I began research for my dissertation project, I had high hopes: I would venture into the dusty archives of University X, Y, and Z and uncover the long-lost writings of mill women, preferably from the southern mountain region, to discover untold truths about their experiences learning new literacies within mill welfare work programs. The letters and diaries I hoped I might find would reflect on how reading and writing impacted women’s everyday lives, the lives of their families, and how they understood their position in the mill. The documents would trace the transition from rural farming communities to a life in company towns. Even better, they would reflect how women’s perceptions of gendered, raced, and classed identities had changed. This might occur through references to mail order catalogues or the highly gendered (and raced) nature of welfare work and the textual culture produced through educational programs on the mill hill. In this way, I strove to research how literacy sponsorship impacted the lives of women in transition, examining how reading, writing, and navigating text impacted the ways women living and working in mill villages experienced southern industrialization, seeking the influence of—and resistance to—welfare work and similar social programs.

After dozens of emails and significant time in different archival spaces, I realized that the goal of finding mill women’s writings was the hope of an active imagination, perhaps one better prepared to write historical fiction than a dissertation in rhetoric and composition. But it is this imagination, and the desire to learn about lives that are difficult to access, that spurs on our questions and our quests; it reflects the “passionate attachment,” to use Royster’s words, which makes research exciting and marks the
commitment of feminist researchers to the lives reflected in their work (Traces 279-281). This imagination also indicates the need to interrogate why we choose our subjects for study gestured to by Glenn and Enoch, and the necessity of, as well as the benefits in, contemplating power dynamics as we construct knowledge. As I embarked on this research project using feminist methodologies, I often walked a line between passion and analytical rigor, simultaneously using creativity and a critical lens in formulating questions and collecting artifacts about a people who were both accessible through formally archived documents and virtually impossible to find. In this way, I often employed a “critical imagination,” defined by Royster and Kirsch as “an inquiry tool, a mechanism for seeing the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating about what could be there instead” (20). My interest in the literate lives of working-class Appalachian women, a population underrepresented in historical studies of literacy sponsorship, brought together the central interests I hoped to pursue in my scholarship: the intersections of gender, labor, place, and literacy sponsorship. This chapter reviews how these interests come into conversation, particularly as the diaries and letters of my imagination failed to materialize during my research process and I returned to the archival artifacts I found with new questions and resourceful methods.

In re-thinking my sources, my work came to focus on artifacts produced by literacy sponsors instead of literacy learners, a move which had a significant impact on my approach to archival research. This transition produced a fuller understanding of literacy campaigns in southern mill villages, but it relied on the groups and individuals within these spaces who already held economic, social, and cultural capital, instead of examining the experiences of those exploited by the industry. While my work does not
tell mill women’s stories in the way I had hoped, my focus on feminist methodologies highlighted the significance of keeping those voices at the forefront of my work. More generally, feminist methodologies created ethical guideposts for navigating the social spaces I encountered doing archival research in part because whether sponsors or learners, the individuals and groups represented did not have an active voice in responding to research questions. Thus, choices in representing them are all the more significant because they cannot immediately “talk back.”

The inability of respondents to temper how I and other researchers interpret their lives emphasizes an already uneven power dynamic between researcher and subject. In contemplating these dynamics of historical research, Glenn and Enoch state: “the issue is not so much that we approach various groups of people or archival collections but why we approach various groups of people or archival collections and how we work to understand and honor their perspectives, their experiences” (24). As feminist researchers, we must seek transparency in motivations for studying a certain population or archive, reflecting on how our theoretical positioning might prime us to be more or less receptive to particular texts or readings of those texts. We must also consider the larger impact our work may have on communities and families connected to our knowledge production. Historical research does not take place in a social or ethical vacuum, and the way we represent research may have consequences beyond our immediate aims or intentions. This understanding was particularly important for me as I moved through archival spaces, searching for one thing and finding another. As the following sections will suggest, historical research offers particular challenges because of the structures involved in
gathering artifacts and the need to construct paths to access the experiences of different 
groups and individuals.

With this in mind, it is significant to highlight how archives are spaces that are 
socially constructed and reflect the explicit decisions of certain institutions (and their 
donors) to value and save particular documents. This “principle of selection,” to use 
Katherine Tirabassi’s term, by default disregards other artifacts because of institutional 
and public interest, the material conditions around storing items, and other factors (172). 
These decisions are made at multiple sites, including the individual or organization’s 
saving of her or his materials, the act of one’s family or other institution deciding 
materials are worth saving and donating, and the archive’s decisions to accept or decline 
donations. Additionally, some archives specialize in the collection of certain kinds of 
materials and decisions about the process of selection are made at an institutional level. 
For example, we see this in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, which is “an 
internationally recognized repository” for papers relating to women’s history in the US 
(Smith College). This kind of archive specialization, and the construction of archives that 
collect papers from populations that may be difficult to find histories for, impacts how 
and where artifacts for projects like mine may be stored or considered valuable. Finally, 
there are material conditions to consider around the saving of artifacts, particularly given 
the fragility of paper as a medium and the specific conditions required to keep documents 
from tearing, molding, and fading. To a large extent, “our ability to construct the past is 
limited to what prior groups deemed valuable and thus saved, and what was deemed less 
valuable and thus tossed” (Goggin quo. in Royster and Kirsch 62).
A second principle of archival research, “categorization,” also helps us consider how saved documents are organized in particular ways that impact how researchers (and archivists) navigate collections (Tirabassi 175). For example, the placement of letters from the mill administrator James William Cannon in the Cannon Mill papers at Duke University juxtapose an order to New York for “half a dozen melons … belonging to the cantaloupe family” presumably for consumption by the Cannon family with letters suggesting that a mill affiliated with the Cannon Corporation avoid breaking child labor laws by hiring “negro women” as sweepers and scrubbers for cheaper wages (“Order to Park and Tilford” and “To O. L. Wagstaff”). This placement is significant because it juxtaposes the lifestyle of owners of industry with laborers, and more specifically laborers of color, rarely employed in the industry during its early years. While this placement is primarily based on the classification of both artifacts as “correspondences” from Cannon and the chronology of artifacts’ production, it creates a very particular narrative. These “principles of selectivity” and “categorization” mean that researchers must consider not only what kinds of texts may be available for examination (and how these texts respond to different kinds of questions), but also how one might access these texts using systems of information already in place. Archivists and the organizations which house collections structure paths through the vast holdings they acquire, blazing trails using identifying key words that researchers might then access and use to navigate the archives on their own. For this reason, we might extend the metaphor of “sponsor” to the agency of the archive itself, as the selection and availability of materials—at least on the surface—is controlled in certain ways by institutional and personal interests and as patrons gain access to resources in exchange for time and the creation of cultural capital.
Working within these constraints, my artifacts required me to represent mill women differently than I originally imagined or leave them out completely. In deciding on the former, I combined more traditional research methods with explicitly feminist approaches to historical work, to forge an unexpected path of research. This path incorporated the artifacts I found with the embodied experiences of exploring mill communities, calling upon Royster and Kirsch’s sites for engagement in feminist rhetorical work that include the “critical imagination,” defined above, alongside “strategic contemplation,” during which researchers seek time and space to further work through absences in their research (21). While critical imagination allows us to use “imagination as a term for a commitment to making connections and seeing possibility,” Royster and Kirsch suggest that this method is only the beginning; they further advocate for “enabling and energizing within scholarly processes a space for rigorous contemplation […] to enact more conspicuously what it means to think critically and innovatively and to pursue actively a robust, intellectual agenda” (19, 21). When combined, these techniques allow feminist scholars to “[notice] without the immediate need to analyze, classify, and establish hierarchies” (Royster and Kirsch 22). They further allow us to pursue questions that may not seem to have direct or instantaneous answers in archival research, and to respond to the difficulties of studying populations, places, and histories that have not been well preserved for any variety of reasons by reading materials more deeply.

These methods therefore impacted my ability to build knowledge over an absence in archival artifacts, implementing “archival accretion.” Jess Enoch and Scott Wible define archival accretion as the process of “building up of archival documents around the
missing piece of evidence. It is the work of collecting a critical mass of archival, primary, and secondary sources that allows one to speculate with a good bit of certainty about that missing element” (emphasis in original). This accretion, in combination with critical imagination and strategic contemplation, allowed me to not only cross-reference sources but construct an understanding around the missing voices in my work using a variety of sources to gain a greater understanding of how mill women were positioned in literacy campaigns. These techniques also brought me into contact with communities in North and South Carolina that were deeply invested in my work, allowing me to cultivate connections with researchers outside of the academe which allowed me to better reflect on my position as a researcher of southern mill culture.

To complement these methods, I would like to present three additional characteristics of feminist work, which are woven into this chapter. These characteristics come from a list in Sato’s ethnographic study on literacy and illiteracy amongst women in Nepal. I have modified them for my work with historical texts, a modification that further mirrors Kirsch’s sites for feminist inquiry in Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research. These characteristics of feminist research include:

1) considering textual orientation in terms of both the historical context of the artifacts used in this project and how the artifacts are currently archived and categorized;

2) considering researcher positioning to better understand my relationship to my topic, the biases and assumptions I brought to my research, and the ways in which I was read as a researcher; and
3) considering *textual representation* in how I present the results of my own work and the communities represented there to audiences within and beyond the academy (Sato 104-108, Kirsch x).

The scholarship of Sato and Kirsch, similar to that of other feminists including Chandra Mohanty and Katherine Kelleher Sohn, advocates the need to work towards the creation of collective knowledges alongside those we research (Sato 108, Kirsch and Mortensen 89-90). This co-creation is emphasized by reflecting on power differentiations at these sites, which provided me with checkpoints to consider how research impacts those researched. Additionally, these sites provide moments where the use of participants’ voices and perspectives may allows us to minimize the exploitation of participants, remaining accountable to the community from which our work stems.

The urge to include the predominantly silenced voices of working-class southern white women in my understanding of literacy sponsorship in mill villages clearly speaks to these goals, though the artifacts available for study complicated this approach. Fortunately, there are ways in which developments in feminist methods and methodologies are creating spaces to allow researchers to better access the complexity of writing a history in the presence of absence. These methods and methodologies emphasize the significance of not only “re-forming the master narratives in the history of rhetoric [and literacy studies] simply to include women” but how researchers may also develop “new paradigms for how our work … might serve as a vanguard for knowledge making and knowledge using in the field” (Royster and Kirsch 13-14). Thus, the processes involved in researching this project did not simply revolve around attempts to *add* to the history of the New South through the mere inclusion of working women’s
experiences. Instead, I sought to shift larger ways of thinking about the literacy campaigns these women encountered in company towns and to offer new methodology for developing a framework of conversations about missing moments in women’s histories.

In further explaining the processes involved in this project, I begin with the more conventional aspects of my archival research, and then move more specifically into how I chose to navigate both the voices and the silences this archival work revealed. The emphasis on feminist methodological practices is referenced throughout, as I explicitly illustrate how these practices impacted how I gathered and interpreted data. Thus, I show how my theoretical lenses operated as touchstones, guiding the researching, reading, and writing that contributed to this project.

**Locating and Searching for Archives**

My archival work was driven by the quest for three kinds of primary texts, aligning with questions of context and history, systems of literacy sponsorship, and literacy practice and everyday usage, teased out in Chapter 1. These texts fell into three general categories:

1. texts providing historical and social context for the constructions of southern Appalachian and mill town women and the mill industry during this time period;
2. texts including diaries, letters, oral histories, newspaper articles, or handwritten notes produced by mill women and, more generally, people living in mill villages between 1880 and 1920 or reflecting on this period; and
3. texts circulating in mill towns and consumed by mill women living and working there.
The initial focus of collecting these kinds of artifacts was to better understand the textual lives of mill women. For this reason, the texts I hoped to find were ones that prioritized the experience of Appalachian women as told through their own voices. Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that the kinds of documents saved in the university archives I visited built around these voices instead of using these voices, though the three categories continued to serve as a guide for my research. More specifically, as my project turned up more and more documents produced by sponsors, the kinds of artifacts I sought remained consistent, though most fit into the first and third criteria.

The collections that contributed to this project are:
### Table 1: Archival Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archive</th>
<th>Collections</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Smith Collection</td>
<td>YWCA of the U.S.A. Records</td>
<td>Smith College, Northampton, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library</td>
<td>Cannon Mills Papers, Frank Traver deVyver Papers, Erwin Mills Papers, Evans-Ward Family Papers, Richard C. Franck Papers, and Amber Arthun Warburton Personal Series, <em>Durable-Durham Doings 1919</em></td>
<td>Duke University, Durham, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern History Collection</td>
<td>Harriet L. Herring Series, John C. and Olive D. Campbell Papers, Myra Page Series, Cone and Glencoe Mills Papers, <em>Durable-Durham Doings</em> (Digital)</td>
<td>University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina Collection</td>
<td><em>Southern Textile Bulletin</em> microfilms</td>
<td>University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Archives of North Carolina</td>
<td>Nell Battle Lewis Papers and Jane S. McKimmon Papers</td>
<td>State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemson University Special Collections</td>
<td>R. Neal Campbell Collection and Hollis Papers</td>
<td>Clemson University, Clemson, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Room</td>
<td><em>A Handbook for Teachers of the Parker School District</em></td>
<td>Greenville Public Library, Greenville, SC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I chose to focus much of my time in larger university archives in an attempt to access as much information in as concentrated a space as possible; I also tried to locate archives close to the area covered in my project, mostly the cotton mill districts of North and South Carolina. This proximity resulted in access to regional collections, though ironically much of the research that makes up this project was located in the Sophia Smith Collection, which focuses on women’s histories. The particular interests of multiple Collections significantly impacted the availability of resources. For instance, the YWCA papers were located in an institution explicitly interested in women’s writing,
while mill-specific papers were often located near the mills from which they came.

Finally, because I conducted much of this work hundreds of miles from my home and academic base, my time spent in the Carolinas included a lot of preliminary explorations, during which I discovered what kinds of options might exist for future work. Choosing larger and more formal archival spaces allowed me to access more general collections relating to some of the larger mills in the region, including the Cone and Cannon Corporations. Although these collections rarely turned up much in regards to artifacts produced by mill women themselves, they helped me to better orient my work geographically and in relation to the broader history of the industry.

Although locating and selecting archives to visit began with these explorations of academic and state archives, my process progressed during my time in the Carolinas to include inquiries into smaller, regional archives and heritage museums. Feminist methodological practices were employed to identify research spaces as well as to inform in the ways sources were approached and analyzed, and I took care to highlight the textual orientation of documents and other artifacts and note the different kinds of repositories in which they were housed. In this way, my archival work took on two basic stages: although it began in fairly predictable venues (the University of North Carolina, Duke, and Clemson University, for example), my quest for texts produced by mill women drew my search to smaller archives and to interactions with communities more embedded in former mill villages. This transition, examined in greater detail throughout this chapter, was in part in response to the suggestions of archivists and scholars from whom I sought research advice. It was also the result of my own interest and curiosity in the people and places I studied.
When browsing for collections of interest using online finding aids, keywords included: Southern textile mills, Southern cotton mills, cotton/textile mill villages, welfare work, Southern Industrialization, women (cotton/textile mill) workers, Southern (Industrial/cotton/textile) women workers, working class women, diaries, letters, writing, literacy, Appalachian, southern mountains, and female operatives (often I combined words and phrases as well, searching “welfare work letters,” for example). Initially I sought documents relating to both cotton and textile mills, but as the research progressed I tried to focus more on work from cotton mills. While these two kinds of mills are frequently collapsed in the texts I call upon in this project, it is worth noting that “textile mills” is often an umbrella term that includes cotton, hosiery, rayon, and other factories that used different methods of production and manufactured different commodities. Additionally, archival evidence suggests these differences were historically understood as significant, at least in some instances. For example, in an interview conducted by sociologist Harriet Herring with Miss Lovell, a “towns-woman”\(^\text{10}\) in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, it becomes clear that the interviewee “knew little about the cotton mill” in the community. Specifically, Herring comes to this conclusion as Lovell comments that the village appeared to be “isolated completely–physically and psychologically” from townspeople like herself (“Mt. Airy” 1). Lovell further insisted that there were no schools in the (cotton) mill village, illustrating the public image of (cotton) mill workers (and their families) as ignorant and illiterate.\(^\text{11}\) On the other hand, when asked about the hosiery mill also located nearby, Lovell claimed:

\(^{10}\) This nomenclature indicates Lovell was not a mill worker and likely a member of the middle or upper class.

\(^{11}\) This interview is not dated, but contributed to Herring’s 1929 book, *Welfare Work in Mill Villages*. Further, the tone of Herring’s notes on the interview with Lovell suggests that there were in fact schools in
the hosiery mill had been a fine thing for the whole town. Many g[i]rls who had
never had a chance to work were provided with employment […] that was
acceptable. [Lovell] cited several families who had taken a new lease on life,
[with] modest little homes or become independent and self respecting because
daughters had been provided with work. She said the impression prevailed that
they got very good wages. (1)

These comments are certainly rooted in Lovell’s experiences with each industry in a
specific place and in relation to specific factories, which varied greatly from location to
location. But these fine distinctions suggest that further work might open greater rifts
between different kinds of mills to bring further nuances to these terms. Because the
research for this project drew primarily from a handful of specific mills, exploring some
of these finer distinctions in manufacturing was put on hold so that I could focus on mills
where welfare work and industry-sponsored literacy campaigns existed. Specifically, the
mills included Monaghan Mills in South Carolina and Cannon, Cone and Glencoe,
Durham Hosiery, Erwin Mills, Haw River, and Cooleemee Mills, all in North Carolina.

As my searches matured, I continued to refine other search terms to more closely
reflect the nomenclature of the period, checking for both “worker” and “operative,” for
example, or “Southern Mountains” and “Appalachian,” to broaden my results and take
into account the ways archives categorize texts. I also searched for specific mills,
including Monaghan in South Carolina, based on places specifically referenced in my
initial work at Smith College and archival collections referenced in secondary research. I
took a similar approach to investigate individuals including Broadus Mitchell and Harriet

the cotton mill village. Herring states: “I gathered that the whole town dismissed the little village from its
calculations expect when they want to give statistics on the variety of industries in the town. […] This
rather bears out Mr. Love’s insistence that they had no schools [out] there” (“Mt. Airy” 1).
Herring, sociologists who worked on mill history and culture, and whose archived collections were referenced in secondary work and available at the University of North Carolina. Anytime a seemingly prominent figure was referenced in a text, be it a researcher, a mill owner, or a welfare worker, I would record the name in an attempt to build a substantial list of characters who inhabited the world of southern textiles. This practice increased the range of my “access points” to the topic (Duff and Johnson 476). Sometimes these searches were successful, other times they were not. Lillian Long, for example, was a major figure in the creation of YWCA industrial branches in the North Carolina cotton mills and frequently produced texts for the Association’s training programs. Unfortunately, information on her life stops with her involvement with the YWCA and I was unable to further pursue personal papers or other biographical documents about her.

While this is not to say that these documents do not exist, it does highlight the challenges of the material and conceptual limits on archival projects, or any scholarly work, which require us to pick and choose where our researching resources go. In particular, I came across the papers of the YWCA very early on in my process, when my interests were focused on finding documents produced by mill women, not documents produced by “outsiders” to the community. In this first encounter with the collection, the bulk of papers I read about the Association contributed to my original hope to learn more about the general context of welfare work. The collection was still valuable in this early period (and become central as my project progressed), but my goals in originally reading the texts were not to access literacy sponsors like the Association welfare workers but
literacy learners. As a result, I returned to this work after my focus shifted, approaching documents with new eyes and new questions.

In addition to collecting a list of historical figures, I also kept a running list of possible archives that included collections peripheral to my study. These primarily included additional institutional collections of papers from mill corporations or collections addressing worker education or southern mills during a later time period. Archives housing these collections were noted but not visited due to time constraints (the Kheel Center at Cornell University and the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University are two examples). In this way, Tirabassi’s archival “principle of closure” came into play, as I “accept[ed] the need to stop researching, realiz[ing] that some discoveries are best left for another time or another researcher, and engage[d] in the process of writing-to share [my] research with the world” (177). Thus, my time period and geographic location, as well as literacy campaigns explicitly targeting women, all contributed to keeping my search for archives contained and as narrow as possible.

Most of my archival work took place within brick-and-mortar archival spaces, as I was able to travel to each location and spend several days, and sometimes several weeks, working through documents. Before visiting most archives, I contacted the archivists there via email to identify whether there were enough sources to justify an in-person visit. In particular, I was careful to articulate my interest in women mill workers, worker education and literacy campaigns, and the time period ranging from roughly 1880 to 1920. In this way, I gained a better understanding of what kinds of sources were available at each location, narrowing down my options as well as forming relationships with
archivists who helped tremendously with locating sources within and beyond their collections.

The sample email below was sent to the Alamance County Historical Museum in North Carolina, a space I found in an Internet search:

Subject: Research Question Concerning Mill Operatives

I am beginning my dissertation research in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst on the function of literacy transmitted through welfare work in the lives of women transitioning from life in the Southern Appalachians to textile mill villages in the Carolina Piedmont during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (this time period is flexible, depending on research available). I have done quite a bit of research on the mill industry and the Appalachian region during this time period, but in addition hope to find texts produced by women during this time of transitioning from farm to mill, including diaries, letters, oral histories, etc. (I realize that unfortunately there may not be many of any of these texts around). While it does not seem that the Alamance County Historical Museum has these kinds of resources from your web site, I was wondering if you would have any suggestions for looking for them. I have done quite a bit of work with the UNC-Chapel Hill Archives as well as contacted the Textile Museum in Gaston County and Glencoe, with little luck so far.

Any suggestions you may have would be greatly appreciated!

Thank you for your time and assistance!

As this example illustrates, I tried to position my study (and myself as a graduate researcher) and lay out some of the other archival sources I had already accessed to avoid repetition and create a sense of ethos, even if limited. In addition, for archives that offered online finding aids, I made sure to include a few examples of collections I thought might be useful to ensure the recipient of the email that I was actively investigating their resources on my end. I received a variety of responses to these communications, usually offering lists of possible sources, though at times also suggesting my time might be better spent at other sites.
I include this particular sample email to illustrate the ways in which my search for locating appropriate archives for my topic branched beyond the larger universities mentioned earlier to include smaller museums and heritage sites that sometimes held their own collections of artifacts. Finding these alternative sites engaged Royster and Kirsch’s “critical imagination” in the research process itself, as I considered where documents might be housed beyond the immediately accessible academic and state-run facilities to include grassroots organizations. This also took into account questions of textual orientation, as some smaller archives contained larger caches of worker documents, which had been donated by local families in an effort to preserve the cultural heritage of a specific community. Unfortunately, relatively few of these sites had archival offerings that corresponded with my specific research, most notably in terms of time period. The Textile Heritage Center at Cooleemee, NC, the Textile Heritage Museum at Glencoe, NC, and the Haw River Town Museum in Haw River, NC did contribute significantly to the process of “archival accretion” as my research questions shifted. Therefore, while some of the smaller archives and museums did not hold specific artifacts cited in the chapters that follow, they did contribute significantly to my attempts to access the lives of mill women, a contribution that will be teased out further in the next section.

While Internet searches and emails from archivists introduced me to the idea of seeking texts beyond larger academic archives, traveling and being present in the Carolinas pushed me further towards individuals and groups involved in the grassroots preservation of textile heritage. These contacts frequently provided valuable word-of-mouth suggestions of places to visit and find possible research materials. The cultural capital of my position as a PhD candidate and the resources available to me through my
home academic library (search engines like WorldCat, databases including JSTOR, and access to inter-library loan) were useful in the planning phases; later, the social capital I gained meeting and working with members of former mill communities was incredibly helpful during my actual time traveling and researching in North and South Carolina. More specifically, the relationships I forged with both institutional archivists and informal archivists who housed their own collections of materials from the mills granted me access to a much wider array of textual resources as well as access to food, suggestions for lodging, and a large amount of contextual knowledge surrounding the experience of living and working in Southern textile mills.

These experiences speak to and expand Johnson and Duff’s work on the use of relationships and archival research methods that identify how social capital is often utilized by archival researchers to find archives and sources (113-114). More specifically though, while the researchers in Johnson and Duff’s essay build relationships primarily with archivists, who are ‘the big gatekeeper[s]’ (120), my own searches led me beyond the walls of the formal archives; I visited the homes of informal gatekeepers within local communities. This “build[s] contextual knowledge” (Duff and Johnson 486), as the process of working within a community—and not just the institutional boundaries of an archive—opened the door to a host of primary and secondary texts that related to white Southern identity within the Carolina piedmont and upcountry. In addition, it emphasized a key principle in feminist work in the co-creation of knowledge with the communities I studied, even as the relationships I began to form were with the descendants of the mill women I sought and not the women themselves (Sato 108, 110; Kirsch and Mortensen 100-101). Thus, while I sought archives containing documents that would allow this kind
of feminist praxis, when those documents were unavailable, my use of feminist methodologies encouraged me to consider “artifacts” beyond the textual and that were housed in spaces beyond larger institutions.

**Locating Texts**

While my research questions shifted from the impact of literacy learning on the lives of learners to questions about the motivations of literacy sponsors during this process, the texts I discovered also led to specific archival methods that allowed me to write about the history of exploited women through the documents of their exploiters. Many of my processes for locating archival artifacts were interwoven with those of locating the archives themselves. Therefore, many of the actual processes of identifying documents that might be useful took place before I stepped into the institutional spaces through online finding aids and conversations with archivists. In this section, I will describe the kinds of documents I collected in different archival spaces and how I began to use these texts and other documents to construct a story of mill history.

After archives and collections were identified, I examined individual artifacts, taking notes and digital photographs for additional examination later. Photographs were incredibly useful in the process of conducting research, as they allowed me to inexpensively make reproductions of documents for later examination and to move with more speed through collections; this proved especially helpful for documents located in North and South Carolina, to which I only had brief physical access. Creating my own digital archives of sorts allowed for more accurate quoting from sources and the ability to return to sources to better contextualize quotes and the particular constructions found within them. Finally, retaining copies of artifacts was essential as my research questions
shifted, allowing me to access sources without having to return to the physical archives where they were housed (while some documents were available through digitized collections, I relied heavily on my own reproductions).

During this time, I also kept a digital research journal with reflections from my experiences and on the artifacts I was finding, which helped me begin to digest what I was finding before I began to formally code and analyze the work. This journal, which was occasionally formalized into research memos that more fully explored individual findings before and after coding, was significant in allowing me to record informal conversations that impacted how I understood my work, though were not necessarily a part of my official data collection. The tracing of my research path and the groups and individuals I met during this process ended up being a significant part of my own process of critical imagination and archival accretion, helping me to access mill women in non-traditional ways, even after the archival research I conducted kept them at a distance in the documents I was able to access. These informal writing spaces also provided me with a way to implement the feminist practice of “strategic contemplation,” defined by Royster and Kirsch “as taking the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around our work” that is “especially useful when traditional, more publicly rendered sources of information are in short supply, as is often the case with the documentation of women’s experiences” (21). While this section primarily addresses the kinds of texts I found during my research process, I will also begin to address these absences and how I began to navigate them through shifts in my research focus.

Broadly categorized, the texts I encountered that corresponded to my research questions in Chapter 1 were consistent with the types of documents I originally sought
(texts about the industry and region, texts written by mill women, and texts circulating within villages). Texts about the industry and the region did not always relate directly to literacy practices, though special note was taken of those that referenced the literacy campaigns included in welfare work programs or the home literacy practices of workers. Texts written by mill women and texts circulating within mill villages were considered literacy events. The following chart illustrates some of these findings:
### Table 2: Categories of Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archive</th>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Categories of Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College</td>
<td>YWCA of the U.S.A. Records</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubenstein Library, Duke University</td>
<td>Cannon Mills Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts written by mill women; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frank Traver deVyver Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erwin Mills Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evans-Ward Family Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts written by mill women (oral history)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard C. Franck Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region (oral history)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amber Arthur Warburton Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Durable-Durham Doings 1919</em></td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts written by mill women; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</td>
<td>Southern Oral History Project</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts written by mill women (oral histories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harriet Herring Series</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region (including interview notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John C. and Olive D. Campbell Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Myra Page Series</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cone Mill Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glencoe Mill Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</td>
<td><em>Southern Textile Bulletin</em></td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh</td>
<td>Nell Battle Lewis Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane S. McKimmon Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Collections, Clemson University, Clemson</td>
<td>R. Neal Campbell Collection</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region; texts circulating within villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lawrence Peter Hollis Papers</td>
<td>Texts about industry and region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This breakdown shows that although there were a broad variety of artifacts *around* mill women, few were produced *by* these women, echoing many of the responses I received from archivists as I tried to identify sites to visit. An excerpt from a research memo early on in my process explains further:

Almost universally, the archivists I contacted at a large number of large, formal university archives (UNC, Duke, Georgia State, Cornell, Clemson, North Carolina State University, the archives for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union…) responded to my request for information with interest, but weariness towards the availability of the texts I sought […]. It was a meeting with the University of Massachusetts, Amherst’s archivist, Rob Cox that crystallized the reality of my search for worker’s archives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When asking for suggestions on addressing the difficulty I was having, Cox pointed out that large institutions, including Universities, had not invested in working class papers until around the 1970’s, unfortunately resulting in the loss of most documents from the earlier time periods I was investigating. One of the reasons the stories of the textile mills had thus far only been told from the perspective of the mill administrators was because until fairly recently in history, these were the only documents valued enough to save. More recent historical work out of UNC-Chapel Hill attempted to amend this privileging, but the work was based primarily on oral history interviews from the 1970’s and 1980’s, resulting in materials that addressed a time period later than my own. Aside from this, the historical interest was traditionally in the merchant and upper class white men who built and managed the mills and not the workers whose actual manual labor made sure the machines continued to run and that cloth was produced.

The availability (or lack thereof) of specific artifacts in the academic and state archives that made up the majority of my initial archival experiences was impacted by the nature of the archives as organized social spaces. Thus, the feminist principle of textual orientation was exceptionally significant in contextualizing the kinds of artifacts I encountered and how these findings impacted my larger research project. Tirabassi describes the transition in her own work from viewing archival spaces as “a storage facility or repository preserving historical materials that might otherwise be lost in closets, attics, barns, and local landfills,” to “a layered, historical record of dynamic
stories” (170). As more and more of my leads turned sour, I began to reflect on the way larger social and cultural values within a community or institution, which determine what documents are sought out and accepted, preserved, and made available for research.

Archives, which I had previously considered neutral spaces, had become highly political.

These politics were especially clear as larger archives consistently provided texts produced by literacy sponsors who already held positions of power in mill villages. At Duke’s Rubenstein Library, for example, collections available to me included records from Cannon and Erwin Mills, and the *Durable-Durham Doings*, a mill publication from the Durham Hosiery Mills. Each of these collections represented a large mill corporation regionally located in North Carolina and the papers found there were ones that related to the interests and concerns of the institutions themselves. For example, even though the *Durable-Durham Doings* newspapers included worker writing, the Durable Doings Hosiery Mill edited the publication, creating an institutional censor for the materials reproduced in its pages. The size of the Cannon and Erwin Mill Collections were also very large, and included institutional documents relating to the running of factories and blueprints and deeds for buildings in company towns. Mill owners and welfare workers produced the bulk of the private papers kept in these collections (business correspondences from the Cannon family, for example), though occasional pieces of worker writing were tucked away in folders (e.g., “Note,” “Sick Note,” and “Evans Family Bible”; see Chapter 5). Worker artifacts make up an incredibly small proportion of the papers saved in the collection, though, and proved a rare find, unique to the Cannon Mills files.
The Rubenstein Library also held collections relating to the mills through their connection with researchers and writers whose work focused on southern industry. Specifically, I examined the Frank Traver DeVyver Papers, the Stowe Family Papers, the Richard C. Franck Oral History, the Mary Cowper Papers, and the Amber Arthun Warburton Papers. Most of these collections covered time periods after my own (between the mid 1920’s to the 1940’s) and consisted of clippings of articles about the southern mill industry, likely used as research. For example, my notes from the Amber Arthun Warburton Papers include summaries of the following articles:

I was interested in this particular collection because of Warburton’s work with the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry and the Brookwood Labor College, both established in the 1920’s. In addition, the university’s archivists suggested the collection when I contacted them for suggestions.

The Warburton Papers held several documents addressing the topics I hoped to find in my research to fill out the context around mill women and texts they came into contact with in the mill village, particularly speaking to perceptions of the mountaineer (DeVyver), women and consumer culture (Andrews), and the selection of readings for worker libraries (Danielsson). Therefore, I decided to read these particular documents based on their content about mill village life and the constructions of peoplehood and women they provided. Unfortunately, they were all published during and focused on the period following my project, constructing a different labor context in mill history. I selected 1920 as the final year of my project because it marked the end of large-scale employer investment in welfare work and mill villages and the beginning of a stronger union presence in southern industry (Hall, Korstad, and Leloudis 265-266). Additionally, changes in methods of production known as the “stretch out” system began shortly thereafter and continued through the 1920’s as “owners tried to cut costs by reducing wages, running their mills around the clock, and making their employees work harder for their pay” in response to an increasingly international market after World War I and
decreased demand for fabric (Leloudis and Walbert). For these reasons, the Warburton Papers illustrate well the kinds of documents I often found in academic archives: while they were useful for filling in the larger context around the historical period of my work and my own understanding of the southern mill industry, often collections addressed a scene very different than the period I hoped to study. While Danielsson’s text, for example, indicated clearly the kinds of literacies and texts some women workers were able to access in worker libraries, the literacy sponsors associated with the Brookwood Labor School in 1928 were vastly different than those in Monaghan Mills in 1904. Therefore, Danielsson’s text is more useful in relation to future research projects.

The presence of so many artifacts from a different time period than that of my study did make artifacts produced and circulated between 1880 and 1920 all the more valuable. For this reason, I privileged time period, physical place, and content that related to gender as I chose to spend more time with papers from the YWCA Collection than the Warburton Papers, even as the former dealt more peripherally with literacy campaigns, as I illustrate below. While I agree with archival researchers who lean away from attributing their findings to serendipity (Enoch and Wible), my experiences suggested the value in casting a wide net to catch a variety of artifacts. It also made clear the value of clear parameters for research combined with great flexibility in terms of research questions. Although I might have chosen to shift the time period my study focused on in response to the research I found, my previous work fleshing out the historical time period would have become too peripheral to later dates. In addition, my interest in feminist methodologies encouraged me to consider how absence in available artifacts might provide a site for productive work, even if it presented different kinds of challenges. For these reasons, I
decided not to change the overall framing of my project, but adjusted its focus instead based on the readings of artifacts described in the next section.

**Coding**

While I took notes and photographs of artifacts at the archives listed above, I also coded my data to further identify key passages and key ideas that were repeated in the texts. My specific goals were two-fold: 1) identify key passages from the mass amounts of artifacts I had collected; 2) from this mass, many which applied to a different time period or were produced by mill administrators or welfare workers, determine what patterns emerged to help guide the analysis of my research. To do this, I created a chart in a word processing program, with columns for the title of each text, significant quotes based on my notes, and a corresponding discursive code to help create categories. In this initial coding, I included all texts that referenced mill life, workers, and literacy in my coding, highlighting specific quotes that addressed methods of production, the (re)creation of peoplehood and place, and conceptions of social space and literacy learning. In this way, the texts and quotes that I coded dealt with the intersections of labor, identity, and literacy central to the exigency for this study (see Chapter 1). My coding system also began with a large number of code words, which were narrowed and re-classified to reduce repetition. I did so in order to get a sizeable view of the landscape my artifacts constructed. Using a digital word cloud program, Wordle, I inserted the coding column of my initial code chart to create a visual representation that made words frequently repeated visually larger. This act allowed me to determine what terms may be of most significance for the analysis of my data, as it made visible the codes that came up most frequently in the document. The Wordle can be seen in Figure 2.
There are several significant aspects of this word cloud and the terms it brings to the forefront. For example, some repeated codes like “women” and “mill” were less useful for me in creating categories to analyze data, as the entire project focused on women’s access to literacy practices in mill villages. On the other hand, the repetition of codes like peoplehood, habitus, and welfare (in reference to welfare work), helped guide changes in my research questions in relation to the kinds of artifacts I found. More specifically, coding made it clear that a large number of my documents related literacy learning and welfare work in model mills (“model” also being a prominent code). Finally, collective social identities (“peoplehood,” as defined in Chapter 1) and words like “assimilation,” “acculturation,” and “control” linked how workers and others in the villages were constructed with the stated intentions of mill administration. The Wordle was not the sole heuristic for organizing the chapters to come, but it was a useful tool for conceptualizing some of the complexities of my initial coding process.
In addition to this initial coding, I also created a separate chart to code concepts of “peoplehood,” with a specific interest in creating a portrait of how worker and sponsor identities were constructed. In this document, I included three columns of codes for each artifact: original codes from my first chart, codes using more refined language of place and people (for example, “peoplehood” was refined to Anglo-Saxon or mill workers), and “extra” codes that either labeled a passage according to possible chapter placement or specific keywords related to specific chapters, which were added in later in the process (for example, the term “deficit” is frequently used as a code to identify where populations were ranked as lacking in social, cultural, or economic capital). A brief example is below:
### Table 3: Coding Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>QUOTE</th>
<th>CODES</th>
<th>Extra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long, Lillian. “The Southern Cotton Mill and the Association Movement.” Reprinted from The Association Monthly, June 1907. YWCA of the U.S.A. Records. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. YWCA/SMITH</td>
<td>3 - About 70,000, or nearly one in ten, of the white people of the state [South Carolina] are cotton mill employees. These people are of good stock and native Americans. Most of them have come from farms where they have failed. Many have come from mountain districts where they have had few or no opportunities.</td>
<td>Peoplehood, pastness, whiteness, Appalachia n, nationhood, workers [See Parker piece for further stats]</td>
<td>Pastness, S. Appalachia n, whiteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-4 - Mill people fall into three classes. There are those who stay at one place, work regularly, pay for everything they buy and are reliable in every way. Others wish to be honest, but are <strong>naturally</strong> improvident, moving often and [pg 4] carelessly spending money, so that they are unable to meet obligations. Then there is a third class which cares little for reputation and is utterly reckless. The fact that most people of a given community cannot be placed on one level socially makes organized effort difficult.</td>
<td>Peoplehood, workers, transients Challenges of working with mill population</td>
<td>Mill workers, living conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deficit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first three columns of the above example are identical to my original coding, while the last two continue to narrow the way I understood the text to function. Finally, I did not conduct line-by-line coding, focusing instead on larger chunks of text, which
sometimes were single sentences and other times consisted of paragraphs. I broke these
chunks up based on content, looking for natural breaks as well as dividing texts based on
the “natural” paragraph and sentence formations.

“Tacking In,” “Tacking Out”

The process of coding allowed me to identify key concepts that repeatedly arose
from my artifacts, emphasizing how welfare workers with the YWCA frequently
described mill domestic spaces in terms of deficit, for example. On an even more basic
level, this process also laid out in a spreadsheet the bulk of texts I encountered,
combining pages and pages of notes and well over 1000 photographs. This process
consolidated and allowed me to better understand the overall picture of mill history my
documents presented. These methods relate to what Kirsch and Royster call “tacking in,”
a process that describes “long-standing analytical tools (such as various stages used for
close textual analysis) in order to focus closely on existing resources, fragmentary and
otherwise, and existing scholarship to assess what we now understand and about what
seems to be missing” (72). “Tacking in” describes where many research projects–feminist
in nature or not–begin, with established academic practices, including formulating
research questions, conducting archival research in large, institutionalized archival
spaces, and methods like coding to begin the process of analyzing data. These steps were
necessary in my own project to help me gather preliminary artifacts and create a strong
understanding of the time period and social context in which my research is embedded.

As I examined the artifacts on a larger scale through coding, I used my research
journal and research memos to synthesize information and identify both “what we now
understand and … what seems to be missing” from my work. In particular, these steps
made it clear that the primary voices I hoped to explore through this project, belonging to women from the Appalachian region living, working, and learning in mill villages, were still absent in the artifacts I had gathered. After working my way through a handful of large academic archives, I collected ample writings describing welfare work, mill workers, and mill village life. I had also found a handful of texts that were circulating within model mill villages between 1880 and 1920, but I had very little to show the experiences of mill women learning, developing, or using literacy skills. Based on the documents I had, it became clear that my research questions would have to shift their focus from exploring literacy learners to center on literacy sponsors, at least for the scope of this project. While I had hoped to re-imagine the ways mill women encountered corporate-sponsored literacies through welfare work programs, I found that the materials I had collected instead spoke to how sponsors imagined these programs to work and their own hopes for how schooled literacies would impact the lives of women and their families. My key methodological question then became, how do I write mill history from the perspective of industry owners and welfare workers without overshadowing the women, Appalachian or not, on whose bodies the industry profited? Further, how could I write about literacy sponsors in this context in an equally ethical and humane way, even as I was wary of their motivations for sponsorship? It is not difficult to set up a binary between owners of industry and the exploited worker, particularly when using materialist and feminist lenses; acknowledging my own complex biases as I examined the documents available for analysis meant acknowledging that the story I had hoped to write about exploitation and the use of literacy for subversion, even if slight, was likely only a small slice of what I would produce out of these artifacts. At least to begin with.
In addition to the gap in women’s writing, there were also fairly few documents among my artifacts that immediately addressed literacy learning or literacy practices. While several sources—archival, primary, and secondary—referred to literacy as a skill taught as part of welfare work programs (Parker, Dawley, Hall et al, Long “The Southern Cotton Mill” 11-12, *Open Letters* 15) and emphasized elementary education within these spaces (“Stories of YWCA Work,” Herring), there were no documents that laid out a course of study during my time period. For this reason, while I knew that literacy learning, development, and usage were a part of welfare work programs and worker education campaigns in the mills where my study took root, I had to look at my data with fresh eyes, seeking literacy events in a much broader sense. Since actual reading lists or library catalogues were not stored in the particular archives I worked through, I reoriented my gaze to include a wider variety of evidence. Including visual images that depicted literacy events and artifacts that taught alphabetic literacy peripherally to other skill sets helped me to understand mill women’s literacy and to consider how it was sponsored as well as how it was used in company towns. Thus, instead of defining “literacy” within the research strictly as alphabetic literacy events like the diaries and letters from mill women I had initially hoped to find, I had to start thinking more instrumentally about how literacies were embedded in the everyday experiences of women.

While “tacking in” allowed me to inventory the landscape my artifacts were beginning to form, “tacking out” describes this second process of re-orientation within this landscape. More specifically, Royster and Kirsch identify “tacking out” as viewing research from afar:
we stand in conscious awareness of what we have come to know by more-traditional means and from that base use critical imagination to look back from a distance … in order to broaden our own viewpoints in anticipation of what might become more visible from a longer or broader view, where the scene may not be in fine detail but in broader strokes and deep impressions. (72)

Feminist methodologies directed my research questions, the kinds of texts I sought, and the concepts I coded for during the tacking in phase of my project, as outlined above. This theoretical lens became even more prominent, though, as I tacked out; processes such as “listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly” became central to the creation of knowledge (Royster and Kirsch 21). To further illustrate how this took place as I worked to analyze my artifacts, I will discuss two specific examples of texts that I collected very early from the Sophia Smith Collection. There were examples of texts created in the Monaghan Mill village, and initially, I thought they provided only loose contextual information about mill life. While these documents are analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 4, in this section I use them to illustrate how using a materialist feminist framework specifically impacted how I understood these texts through tacking out.

Re-Seeing Texts in Monaghan Mills

The YWCA Scrapbook for Monaghan Mills (1900-1906) and the Monaghan Mills Cookery Text Book (1910) are both housed in the YWCA of the U.S.A. Records at Smith College, and are some of the earliest artifacts I came across during my archival research. Both texts were produced as part of welfare work programs at Monaghan Mills in Greenville, SC, which represented some of the Association’s earliest endeavors in the southern mill industry. When I first came across these artifacts, I took photographs and a
few basic notes, recognizing their uniqueness as actual texts that had circulated within the
village. As I still hoped to focus my project on mill women’s writing (and not texts
produced by welfare workers and other literacy sponsors), I did not spend much time
with the texts. They represented what I felt already existed in conversation about mill
village life: while I reveled in the old photographs of the scrapbook, they did not provide
me with alphabetic text to analyze and the recipes in the Cookery Text Book were
interesting, but did not seem as significant as the letters I anticipated finding later.

The Monaghan Scrapbook is the most difficult to imagine as significant for a
project on literacy sponsorship. For one, although the book does represent a text
produced at the mill, it was most likely produced by welfare workers themselves and
there is little writing involved aside from brief (and only occasional) handwritten
captions. In this way, the book could not serve as a literacy primer, and it is difficult to
discern what role mill women had in its construction or even if they came into contact
with it. When I first discovered this artifact in the Sophia Smith Collection, my main
interest was in the visual representations of women within it. I took careful photographs
of each page, often zooming in to try to capture the expressions and finer details of the
pictures. Unfortunately, it was impossible to identify any of the occasional reading texts
that appeared in photographs of the mill’s “Library and Reading Room” and various
rooms in the “Secretary’s Cottage.” This vagueness suggested to me that the pictures
would not be directly useful beyond supporting the notion that women were in fact
interacting with texts in mill villages. In my initial encounter, I had a difficult time seeing
past the deficit in concrete details about literacy practices to imagine the photographs in
the scrapbook as anything more than supplementary materials, illustrations that might
accompany other artifacts actually *describing* the actions. In this way, I was also privileging alphabetic text in my process. Although I acknowledged value in the visual depictions of literacy events, I sought more “substantive” sources for information. How much could I actually garner from simple photographs of unidentified women holding unidentified books?

As it became clear that mill women’s writing was going to be challenging to find, I returned to look more closely at the texts produced by the welfare workers at Monaghan, as they represented the largest batch of writing from literacy sponsors that I had found. From a distance, these texts were also significant as they were produced by women, granted a different population of women, who worked as literacy sponsors within mill villages. This “category” of “woman” (white, middle and upper class, formally educated, often hailing from a different geographic region) represented a very distinct group from the women my project set out to explore. Reading and listening more deeply to the training documents of welfare workers at Monaghan and examining with softer eyes the photographs in the Scrapbook, I began to consider how as literacy sponsors, welfare workers occupied a complex space between the methods of production that drew labor power from workers and the domestic spaces and reproduction of the workers themselves. I put aside my resistance towards studying northern missionary women who entered the mill village to “civilize” the mountaineer and began to imagine their position and complicate it. What might emerge from the documents of these women? How might they shed light on the women I hoped to access?

While coding documents around the Scrapbook, one note in particular stood out to me: Lillian Long, a YWCA worker, explained the purpose of the Secretary’s Cottage
(which housed welfare workers from the Association within the mill village) as an “object lesson,” a phrase also repeated by Pearl Wyche, a welfare worker at Cone Mills in North Carolina (Long “The Southern Cotton Mill” 7, Wyche “At Proximity” 3). It occurred to me that if the Secretary’s Cottage in the photos from Monaghan was intended as a model for mill women, then the significance of the pictographic representations was actually quite large. Thus, while I had limited documents from the welfare workers that explicitly referenced literacy practices, I did have visuals that suggested these practices were highly valued, both within more “public” spaces like the mill’s Reading Room and in the private space of the home, where Secretaries displayed books and a writing desk in view of mill women visiting the home. While women like Long and Wyche doted on the success of mill women imitating the arrangements of furniture exhibited in the Secretary’s Cottage, it seemed likely that these arrangements might include the presence of alphabetic texts (Long “The Southern Cotton Mill” 6-7). Returning to the Scrapbook helped me to locate value in “everyday, fragmentary, mundane, interrupted, incomplete, and scribbled” scraps of literacies—the sorts of literacies highlighted in approaches to feminist rhetorical practices advocated in feminist methodological work (Royster and Kirsch 63). When we transfer these rhetorical methods and methodologies to work in literacy studies, in addition to broadening how we define literate practices and the kinds of literacies people access in different sponsored spaces, we also reconceive how we look for these practices and what kinds or artifacts “count” as representing literacy events. We must move to “confront [our] own assumptions and ways of reading” when conducting research and analyzing data around absence (Royster and Kirsch 62).
I also considered the second artifact, Monaghan’s *Cookery Text Book*, as peripheral in my early data collection. This was in part because the book was created by Clara Graves, the Domestic Science teacher of the mill’s YWCA branch; its content consisted of recipes for mill women to use within the home, teaching them new skills that did not relate to their home cultures or food habits (1). While I sought documents that were circulating within the mill village during the period of my study, at first I failed to recognize the *Cookery Text Book* as a literacy primer; perhaps I desired more exotic texts (and certainly ones written by *mill women*) early on in my research processes. Further, as I strove to locate alphabetic texts that constituted a more conventional understanding of a literacy event, I saw the book as representing a reader for women who already had literacy skills. For these reasons, while I marked the presence of the text in the collection, I did not spend much time on it.

My experience in circling back to Graves’ text illustrates tacking out well, as temporal distance allowed me to return to the document with new eyes. After several months of archival work, my coding of documents produced by literacy sponsors made it clear that campaigns targeting women often attempted to rewrite the social space of the mill hill through class habitus, particularly in the domestic sphere. Finding consistent constructions of Appalachian women in terms of deficit (keeping messy homes, for example) encouraged me to read (and reread) artifacts more carefully for ways that domestic spaces were addressed through welfare work and how literacies were utilized within these moments. In this way, while more traditional practices produced a particular landscape using the artifacts available in the process of tacking in, the resulting tacking out allowed me to re-evaluate this landscape, focusing more intently on particular peaks
and valleys. The *Cookery Text Book* was not a literacy primer in the most immediate sense because it was not explicitly produced to directly teach reading and writing. But it did illustrate very clearly the way literacies within the mill (and more significantly sponsored by mill welfare work) extended beyond just reading and writing skills to include ways of thinking and navigating the social world. It was also an excellent example of the materiality of reading culture on the mill hill: an actual artifact that I could touch and turn the pages to view recipes that made up women’s daily lives. Given the time, I could even reproduce these recipes at home, moving through the same steps as the women I studied to prepare specific dishes. The cookbook’s full significance was not apparent until I had a better understanding of my research questions and the resources I had to address them. As the project turned towards the texts of welfare workers and other literacy sponsors, this book became one of my most important finds. Tacking in identified the artifact, but tacking out centralized it on the map.

Even as both of these artifacts reproduced the intentions of literacy sponsors, I came to see that we could also use them to address the ways mill women were positioned in mill literacy campaigns. In particular, they are both significant as they take literacy campaigns beyond classroom spaces and into the home, illustrating how literacy learning was not just about the actual skills of reading and writing within the village, but also about how women and their families lived and organized their space. Thus, this shift illustrates a greater understanding of the orientation of texts within the village and the lives of women and reinforces how literacies are more than just alphabetic reading and writing—they also impact the navigation of social space. In addition, this work of tacking in and out speaks to the method of archival accretion. In similar ways to Royster and
Kirsch’s processes, Enoch and Wible suggest that to address missing artifacts in archival work, we can create a “critical mass” around the gaps (tacking in) that allow us to make educated guesses about information that might not otherwise be available (tacking out) (“Archival Encounters”). The Scrapbook and Text Book then, are not only valuable artifacts, but also contribute to the critical mass around the missing voices of mill women. Each uses literacy to reconstruct social space and habitus within the mill village and each describes mill women as welfare workers hoped to see them. While mill women remain in many ways inaccessible, examining how their surroundings were produced and reproduced through discursive and pictorial accounts constructs a space in which we might talk around these communities and think through how their representations were used to support southern industrialization.

**Extending Archival Accretion**

My experiences visiting and researching in smaller archives and historical societies in North and South Carolina also contributed greatly to my project. These interactions, during which I began to form relationships with grassroots historians and individuals interested in preserving southern mill culture, contributed to the “critical mass” of archival accretion and the tacking out through the cultivation of critical imagination and strategic contemplation. In their explorations of archival accretion during the Rhetoric Society of America’s Webinar, “Archival Encounters: Dealing with Absence,” Enoch and Wible both referenced the impact that the materiality of on-site research had on their own archival work. Seeing the same material artifacts and physical places as their research subjects provided them with important insight into how to address absence, partly by fostering imaginative visualization. In particular, Enoch reflected on
her attempts to “recover materiality no longer present.” In researching women’s rhetorical practices at the Harvard Annex program for women in the early twentieth century, she asked questions like: “How do we gauge any sort of accuracy as to what these people were? What they were doing?” (Enoch and Wible). She reflects that literally walking along the same streets as the women she studies can be a means of accessing a kind of affective experience that complements her own intellectual work. I see the quest to “think multimodal-ly” that Enoch embarked upon in visiting the historical sites related to her work as embracing critical imagination and strategic contemplation.

My similar experiences, including standing outside of the Monaghan Mills building and meeting with members of the Monaghan Heritage Society, were central to my own feminist research methodologies; these experiences informed my sense of researcher positioning, as they grounded my own understanding of mill village communities. This occurred in two main ways in heritage museums and local historical societies: 1) through the process of archival data collection mirroring that already teased out above and 2) through the affective experience of connecting to and working with communities invested in my research from both an intellectual and social interest. Attending the meetings of Heritage Societies and having informal conversations with self-proclaimed amateur historians allowed me to reflect on the power dynamics between researcher and subject, as I became accountable to individuals for the way I represented mill women they identified as ancestors. Thus, by expanding my search for artifacts beyond the walls of academic archives and into community spaces, I not only gained access to additional documents, I also learned more about the people my study strove to uncover, but whom my research never quite found.
The collection of artifacts and affect took place in two kinds of spaces: named archives (the Carolina Room in the Greenville, South Carolina Public Library and the archives at the Textile Heritage Center in Cooleemee, North Carolina) and at the meetings of Heritage Societies (Haw River Historical Society in North Carolina and the Monaghan Mills Historical Society). I also visited the Glencoe Mill Village Museum outside of Burlington, North Carolina twice, examining some of the documents and other artifacts available there and receiving lots of reading suggestions from the curators. My methods at the Carolina Room and Cooleemee were very similar to those outlined above, moving through various documents that related to women’s reading and writing practices, taking notes on my computer and by hand, and taking photographs when appropriate. At Cooleemee I also took photographs of two school projects by a local village resident, which I offered to the archivists as digital copies to use for their own purposes.

What was most interesting in regards to my “work” at each of these five sites was how it began to help me address the risk my project faced of reinstating the history of the mill industry through its heavy reliance on the voices of mill owners and welfare workers—characters who already had power within the narrative. More specifically, as the following chapters suggest, the writings of welfare workers and mill owners that addressed the identities of literacy learners often did so in ways that conjured the same “mountaineer” that local color and travel writers embedded in the American imagination beginning in the mid-nineteenth century (see Chapter 1). Without the actual voices of mill women, it was becoming hard to see how studying the texts I found was actually adding to these historical conversations. While my initial project strove to uncover the voices of women buried by the march of capitalist progress, the voices that buried them
were the only ones that survived. How was it possible to write about a population without that population?

In beginning to respond to this question, which grew louder as my archival work progressed, I turned to a growing number of people beyond the walls of the academy. The limited time I had to spend down South doing archival work and the fact that I was not collecting oral histories complicated my relationship with some of these sites though, as I often felt during my visits I was only able to begin cultivating relationships with the groups and individuals that welcomed me into their spaces. In fact, I often arranged visits with these sites more in response to my own interest in the history than as an explicit attempt to collect artifacts for my work. I was surprised, then, when the experiences I had speaking with the curators at Cooleemee and the Glencoe Mill Village Museum added to the “critical mass” of sources surrounding the archival silences. For example, while conducting my research, I wrote about the impact of visiting the Haw River Historical Society in my research log. Haw River was a mill village associated with a large mill on the outskirts of Durham, NC, where I was staying. This Historical Society meeting was my first of that kind and I quickly jumped at the chance to attend, hoping it may lead me to information on possible research sites in the area. While this was not the immediate case, attending the meeting introduced me to men and women to whom my work was accountable and reminded me in very real ways that the words I wrote about mill workers reflected back to communities.

As a researcher from Massachusetts (though born and raised in Virginia), I entered the space marked with certain kinds of capital (and without others); although my work sometimes felt like it took place in a vacuum in my academic home, it was very real
in the space of the meeting. These markings read more prominently than they may have in the controlled archives I visited at Duke or Clemson, making the experience embodied in a way that I had not expected. My journal entry, dated August 31, 2012, explores the significance of incorporating “extra-archival” experiences in the accumulation of critical mass in my work as well as the affective aspects of the evening. It is quoted here at length:

I admit I was a little amazed by the friendliness of the HRHS when I showed up at their meeting this week; almost everyone I made eye contact with smiled and said hello, and after finding out I was unattached, one of the women promptly assured me she would find me an eligible gentleman before looking around and admitting that there probably weren't any there who were a good age for me (needless to say, I was one of the younger attendants). Best-intentioned heteronormativity and social control aside (another unattached older woman there quickly spoke up in alliance with myself and my single-hood), the meeting was wonderful: an example of a community coming together on a regular basis to discuss social news, support one another, and talk about their history. The speaker for the evening was a man born in 1924 who grew up in Haw River [and] walked us through the town's Main Street, describing the people and places who inhabited it, careful to relate an individual to each storefront he described, sometimes […] prompted along by the audience, many of whom shared his memories. When the talk was brought to an end, the speaker expressed his frustration at hardly getting to any of what he wanted to talk about that night, and just before the meeting adjourned to snacks and casual conversations I, as a guest (AKA a face no one knew) was asked to introduce myself, which I awkwardly did.

A handful of people were eager to talk to me about my project [after the meeting], offering suggestions for books to read (most often Like a Family, which I read a few years ago for my exams) and about looking into the lives and letters of mill school teachers as well as explore the local cemetery. I think what was most interesting to me though, was how weird I felt at times in this room of people who were for the most part excited that I was studying women in the mills, but around whom I felt very out of place. I think a lot of what I was working through came from actually coming into contact with the remnants of communities I am studying; I have read a lot of books about Appalachia and mill towns, but have spent such little time in these spaces that it seems completely absurd that I may claim to know anything about either. Book knowledge is not the same as lived experience, but it can be hard to remember that when one is locked away in a library.
The discomfort I reference is in relation to my own researcher identity, brought to light by my work within a community where I was marked as “other.” While my racial identity was undoubtedly visible and invisible in these frequently white spaces, my gender positioned me as non-threatening in contrast to perceived class and regional identities, which were middle-class and Northern. Experiencing affect in these spaces, then, included both the pleasant feelings of community and the discomfort of facing a real, invested audience beyond the academy that was wary of me. Another excerpt from the same research journal entry puts it this way:

I am really enjoying being so close to the mill region (being IN the mill region), but I am realizing I have a lot to think about in the way that I present my work (and myself?); the ethics of representation are haunting me as I meet men and women who were born and grew up in company housing and whose families make up the population I seek to learn about. Tuesday [in Haw River] I didn't immediately introduce myself as a grad student, as studying in the North; in fact, I was kind of embarrassed to introduce myself at all. Why did it seem so hard to get those words out? They called me a Yankee anyway, it's in how I dress, how I present myself. My professional training has taken place in Massachusetts; I am an outsider doing this research. Dear God, this is turning into an identity crisis.

Often within these small archives, I wrestled with justifying my own interest in my work to women and men whose glances were wrought with what I could only read as suspicion. I quickly learned, for example, that I did not need to wear “professional” clothes to Heritage Society meetings (though looking “presentable” was no doubt appreciated) and that identifying first as from Richmond, Virginia set a different tone than using my institutional identity with a northeast university. Organizations and individuals were almost always open to talking to a student, but being a student from outside the region seemed to bring with it assumptions of Yankee snobbery and questions
about why I would be interested in southern cotton mill history, traveling such a long way from Massachusetts for a research project.

The quizzing I experienced in these spaces was more difficult than merely reciting key words to archivists at Duke or Chapel Hill, and forced me to reflect on my own position for people who weren’t convinced of my good intentions just because I was getting a PhD. The curators at Cooleemee, for example, asked me to define my terms because they were personally and intimately invested in how I defined “Appalachian.” Their interest reminded me that just because someone hails from a geographic area defined in particular ways (often by outside powers) does not mean that they identify personally as others have identified them. While contemporary scholars of Appalachian literacies frequently cite this challenge (Snyder), as a historical researcher the women I am researching do not have a voice to name themselves. These experiences helped me consider ways to reframe identities, regional or otherwise, as literacy sponsors implement them rhetorically in their constructions of peoplehood. For example, in a training document from the YWCA dated 1909, it is stated that:

One can judge women fairly well by their openness about the snuff habit. A better type of woman is embarrassed if she is caught using it. I have recently been in a mill where this sign is in one of the rooms—‘Ladies and gentlemen will not spit on the floor, others must not.’ In this town the snuff and tobacco habit exceeds anything I have previously known and the rest of the living corresponds. Women are shiftless in the homes and careless in dress and morals. (“The Work of the YWCA” 2)
This depiction of women, which differentiates “ladies” and “gentlemen” from other workers, is useful not necessarily as “proof” that women from the Appalachian region or in the mills used snuff, but in the ways it distinguishes women based on behaviors deemed unacceptable by welfare workers. Thus, the portraits I try to see in these textual moments reflect more on the sponsors creating the portraits than the women depicted. Remembering that the illustrations of the Appalachian region and people, mill women, and other historically exploited groups are often impacted more by ideological influences than by fact (Mortensen “Representations” 106, 108), I tried to understand the textual orientation of representations of women, such as the text above, in terms of the text’s specific purpose; I tried to access what was valued and devalued without re-ascribing this judgment myself. In fact, we may even go so far as to consider that women using snuff might have been an act of resistance to mill rules, or at least a show of tension as rural ways came into conflict with the “respectable” life welfare workers hoped to cultivate.

My travels also brought me in contact with individuals in Haw River, Raleigh, and Greenville, South Carolina who read my work through the lens of family. This orientation led them to insist on the agency of mill workers, sometimes standing up for the mill owners who economically and socially exploited them, to defend their ancestor’s right to choose the difficulties of mill life over the difficulties of farming. They were generations removed from the time period of my project, but their reactions reminded me that I was recreating a history that exists in varied versions. It was also a good reminder to constantly consider how I depicted mill village life; instead of making absolute claims about “how things were,” my work looks at discursive and visual constructions to formulate ways of understanding literacy campaigns. This framework helped me begin to

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navigate the stickiness of writing about a population excluding its own accounts and amongst seemingly conflicting later accounts of what happened, which varied from family to family and mill to mill.

As researchers, we must remain fluid ourselves when we depict fluid social spaces and physical places. While in some ways this may seem counterintuitive when writing history based on archival artifacts, hearing accounts of mill life from individuals who felt counter to many of the depictions I had read in secondary sources enacted moments of critical imagination, muddying the waters of the past through memory and stories that felt very real to the people sharing them. An excellent example comes from the clash between the typical depictions I had been reading of worker exploitation and poor living conditions in the mill village (“Interview with Mr. Zeb Stone” 4, Dawley) and descriptions of a nearly utopian mill village experience presented by Leon Neal from Raleigh. Neal went so far as to use the word “Camelot” in describing his childhood growing up in the village of Caroleen in North Carolina. There are many possibilities that these differences may point to: mill villages were vastly different across time and space in regards to living and working conditions and it is possible that idealizing company towns could also be seen as a move toward protect those communities from outside (Northern) researchers. Regardless of the motivations, the passionate commitment many held towards their mill village heritage complicated the relationship I had previously accessed between worker and industry.

The nostalgia that often shrouds mill village memories is rooted in a very real sense of community and kinship networks that may be difficult for an outsider to conceptualize or a researcher to qualify. The correspondence referenced above from
Neal, a retired aerospace engineer and “lay historian” of mill history, was sent to me in response to an inquiry about possible archival holdings at the Greenville Textile Heritage Society, whose staff forwarded my email along to Neal. In his response, he wrote:

I am extremely PROUD of my cotton mill village heritage and as a 'lay historian' I spend quite a bit of time on activities we hope will help to preserve a 'more balanced' historical view of life in Southern cotton mill villages. [Note: I know that the vast majority of written materials about this life is biased to the point of being false primarily because it was written by outsiders who did not really understand the cotton mill workers, their lives, and their work - i.e. labor workers, academics, Yankee visitors who knew nothing of what they saw, and others[...] The mill workers themselves were too busy living and working to spend time writing about their lives.

[...]

To even begin to try to understand the textile workers you have chosen to study—female or male—you should begin by trying to understand ‘who these people were—how they thought—what was their heritage—and how did they ‘feel’. If you do not understand the people then any attempt to understand what they wrote is bound to produce errors. (emphasis in original, Personal Correspondence)

This was—and still is—a tall order. Further, Neal clearly positions me (as both an academic and to his knowledge a Yankee visitor) as one with socially acknowledged power and expertise in writing about a population he doubted I truly understood. Neal went on to suggest several books for my library, including Ben Robinson’s *Red Hills and Cotton: An Upcountry Memory*, which he described as “a wonderful book—and it tells you about ME—this is my heritage” (emphasis in original, Personal Correspondence). My email exchanges with Neal (which have continued and even turned into in-person visits), made it very clear that for some residents of the mill hill, family and community were *the* sustaining value in company towns. Further, Neal served as a gatekeeper for the
community; if I could convince him of my good intentions, I felt like I could be assured of taking an ethical stance.

Although it was always from a distance, I eventually began to access the sense of community and familiarity referenced by many mill hill memories from workers. I gained this sense of community by getting out of the archives and doing things like sitting on the front porch of the Museum in Cooleemee or attending the “Mill Hill Christmas” choral concert in Greenville. Such moments allowed me to combine a historical knowledge of the mill industry (cultural capital) with a social navigation (and social capital) that stretched beyond traditional archival spaces. These performances of community were further enlightened by informal conversations with the women and men who hosted them, sipping tea sweetened with Tang or eating BBQ sandwiches with red slaw at kitchen tables and screened in porches. I suggest these “sessions,” which I felt privileged to experience in the first place, allowed me to “collect” affect, more so perhaps than artifacts. In other words, the processes of navigating interpersonal interactions impacted my processes of knowledge production, but in a way that nourished and were nourished by critical imagination and strategic contemplation in conversation with more traditional methods.

The archival research I conducted in Cooleemee, North Carolina gave me the ultimate opportunity to draw on strategies of critical imagination and strategic contemplation in my research, as the curators of the Museum, Lynn and Jim Rumley, welcomed me into their space with their own reservations, but promptly became some of the most influential individuals in helping me imagine mill village spaces. Conversations with the Rumleys, two former union organizers who devoted their days to the
preservation of the mill culture in North Carolina, took on their own family dynamic, as I talked about history and research with Jim and economics and culture with Lynn. Both shared with me their investment in their work, much of which was based off a genuine enjoyment and respect for cotton mill people and heritage. Talking, often over food and coffee or during the Rumleys’ cigarette breaks outside, not only cultivated my imagination but also created a safe space for me to think about the ideas with which I was presented and synthesize my research while consulting local experts on these matters. In particular, Lynn Rumley’s understanding of her work at Cooleemee struck me as significant. During a casual conversation while I leaned on the doorway of her office, Lynn told me that cultivating village heritage grew an alternative to fast consumer capitalism for the community in which she lived. Her work with the Heritage Museum was not just one of preservation, it was also a work that built a present and future that honored commitment to family and kinship.

Viewing community as a shelter for workers, both historically and in today’s society, helped me connect aspects of my work to larger social projects aimed toward preserving the culture of mill villages. It crystallized the significance of kinship networks on the mill hill as a haven for people to meet their needs in ways that may not have immediately involved the industry, becoming a site for resistance of the all-encompassing capitalist push of the company town. I had certainly read claims that identified worker-centered community as a source of agency for women and families on the mill hill, most notably in Hall et al’s assertion that welfare work strove to dismantle kinship networks rural workers maintained from their home communities and to thus realign mill villages around mill resources (264). But the embodied significance of this appropriation and the
ways communities might resist had been difficult, if not impossible for me to grasp from the archives where I had spent much of my time collecting research. The rough sound of Lynn’s voice, our physical presence in space, driving past the nearby mill building, which was slowly falling to the ground: these elements allowed me to listen “multisensibly” and “multimodally” to accumulate and incorporate knowledge in a different, affective way.

While many of our processes for creating knowledge are based on the interpretation of texts and other “concrete” artifacts in conversation with each other, expanding my own work of archival accretion to heritage society meetings and lunch dates with museum curators and others opened my research to a more holistic approach. Royster and Kirsch speak of the outward journeys in the research project, during which we travel to archives “in real time and space, more in keeping with traditional notions of fieldwork.” They also reflect on the inward journeys: “the resul[t] from critical imagination, meditation, introspection, and/or reflection [that] gets mapped, perhaps simultaneously, as both an analytical [journey] and a visceral one” (85), relating to principles of researcher positioning. While the freewriting in my research journal fits more immediately into the category of strategic contemplation, my experiences on-site in North and South Carolina also provided spaces for meditation on the artifacts I collected and the kinds of stories I patched together, as these processes contributed to my overall archival accretion.

**Circulation and Textual Representation**

While the previous section reflects on the ways interacting with mill communities impacted my processes of knowledge creation through archival accretion, critical imagination, and strategic contemplation, these experiences were also significant in
reflections on textual representation in the writing of my study. In particular, as conversations with the Rumleys and Neal concretized the accountability I had to the communities I studied (and to their forbearers), they also emphasized the importance of how I used the texts I did have in my work. Experiencing workers through explorations of the communities around them, across the boundary of time, allowed me to honor their missing voices and keep them present in my work—even in their absence.

In the pages that follow, I describe a particular moment in industrial development where power and capital were distributed unevenly across company towns. Unfortunately, the only documents available to build these descriptions were those created and circulated by those in positions of power: literacy sponsors. As researcher, I had final say in which texts were actually used and how they were positioned to represent sponsors and learners, giving me the ability to be complacent with or complicate portrayals to my best abilities. Entering this project, I was well versed in Appalachian and mill history, particularly between 1880 and 1920, and was more likely to see the mill village in dualistic terms: mill owners were exploitative capitalist, while workers were the highly exploited employees. Welfare workers tended to fall closer on the spectrum to mill owners as the well-meaning missionaries of means, who entered the village to “save” the rural whites. These categories do not create ethical representations of the populations that made up this history though, and the guidepost of feminist methodological practice that shines a light on who benefits from the way we represent our work was essential for trying to recognize and correct the biases I began this project with (Sato 107).

It may be impossible to ever even the playing field between researcher and participant, especially when the results of research circulate within academic audiences,
potentially disconnected from the spaces of participants. If nothing else, I gain cultural, social, and even economic capital from both my archival research and my stories of working with people like the Rumleys and Neal; this is evidenced through the completion of a degree, publications, and my recent tenure track job offer, all based on this project. Meanwhile, the communities I study stand to gain visibility as my work circulates, but it is easy to imagine that in the most immediate sense I have more to gain through our exchanges than they do. Because each agent is thus impacted by the ways in which I represent text, it is essential to remain reflexive about the viewpoints and biases I bring to the sites of data collection to avoid reifying those biases onto the bodies of my research subjects. Reification occurs when the social nature of production is lost to the product itself, whether that manifests in the invisibility of the labor that built a chair, or the naturalization of the social processes of distinction that construct identity. In the chapters that follow, I strive to forefront the nature of social construction in positioning literacy learners and sponsors to avoid this kind of reification. I do this by looking more closely at artifacts that may seem at first glance mundane, and thus highlighting the ways certain assumptions are embedded in their fabric.

An excellent example of this challenge manifested in fliers from Cone Mills that appear in Chapter 4 and set out guidelines for appropriate use of space in the mill village. While the analysis that happens later in this project connects the significance of these literacy events in helping us to better understand the ways literacy campaigns functioned on the mill hill, I would like to focus in this section on using these texts as artifacts that indirectly represented mill women in very specific ways. In particular, the documents (like many that I found during my research) focus on perceived deficits in the way mill
families lived. These documents were created within larger social conversations that constructed rural whites by using tropes that linked them to the mythic mountaineer and other stereotypes; the implication that without the guidance of industrial labor and mill welfare work, workers lacked the social literacies (cooking, cleaning, child care, basic hygiene and so forth) to sustain in a village setting. For example, a document announcing a village-wide competition for the “best kept yard” concludes with the following:

Above all, keep your premises clean. Don’t let dirt and trash lie around. Don’t throw paper out and leave it to be scattered over the yards and streets by the wind. Collect all trash in a heap and the company wagon will call for it.

Look around your place every once in a while, and see that everything is in good condition. (“Notice: Prizes”)

The document has no date, but is amongst similar papers including a flier from 1912 barring dogs and chickens from running loose on mill property (“Notice”). The portraits of village life and workers that these documents portray reflect residents as lacking in the cultural and social capital necessary to fully participate in (and “fit in” to) town life. In similar ways that Whisnant and others critique the public construction of the Appalachian mountaineer as highlighting social (and therefore fixable) deficit to obscure the economic causes of rural poverty (see Chapter 1), these documents from Cone Mills only attend to the surface of the issues that many families faced on the mill hill. While these kinds of cleanup projects likely did improve hygienic conditions in mill villages (particularly when accompanied by infrastructural improvements), if these fliers represent some of the
only constructions of mill workers that have survived in specific archival spaces, we must be careful to contextualize them in terms of how they are represented to an audience.

As I read documents like the notices described above, I frame them as social readings of a space that maps class onto a physical landscape. In other words, as I analyze the content and use the documents in my work, I try to highlight how the spaces are produced and not just how they are described. While we have limited access to what worker yards looked like, the fliers mentioned above indicate that there was tension in some cases between the expectations of the mill administration and welfare workers and residents; further, literacy events were structured by literacy sponsors (administrators and welfare workers) that laid out a sense of the “appropriate” use of space and displays of habitus, exerting the power of mill corporations to define both living and working conditions of mill hill residents. Working with documents that portray an exploited population in terms of deficit require questions about how the texts function within a community, how they respond to (build upon, complicate) representations of populations and places, and how they might be used in a way that cultivates a feminist ethic of care towards the women, men, and children we study. This sensitivity in our reflections requires taking time in one’s research to truly contextualize artifacts; while a text may be taken at face value, there are also social relations behind its production that reflect through and must be accounted for. Further, fair representations often require a “commitment to look and look again, listen and listen again, think and think again recursively,” all processes which take time and dedication (Royster and Kirsch 77).

As we consider how texts are represented in the creation of knowledge, it is also significant to briefly discuss how I understood different categorizations of text during my
process. By making more transparent what “counts” as archival, primary, and secondary sources I highlight the complexities of these decisions and acknowledge the ways in which the categorizations are a political choice. Archival research provided the most direct route to constructing (and reconstructing) the histories of mill literacy campaigns in model mills in the Carolinas, but as articulated above, primary and secondary sources were instrumental in building my understanding of the period and how literacies were framed. This combination of sources allowed for points of cross-referencing to follow “contextual traces” within texts and fill in the gaps in archival material (Tirabassi 173-174), producing the fullest possible portrait for my study. I labeled texts “archival documents” that were available only through brick-and-mortar or digitalized archival collections; in both of these contexts, the researcher must gain “access” to materials, even if that access is merely the use of a particular online portal. These documents vary as some texts formally archived were originally published for public circulation, including promotional pamphlets and other materials from the Young Women’s Christian Association (Sophia Smith Collection). Articles and other texts that were clipped from newspapers and kept in the larger “papers” of a particular historical figure or in a text like the Erwin Mills Scrapbook are additional examples that blur this boundary but that I still considered archival; these clippings were available primarily through a specific collection. On the other hand, other archival artifacts were more clear, like the handwritten welfare work schedules of Pearl Wyche (Cone Mills Papers, Southern Historical Collection) that were created for circulation to a limited public (within the mill village, for example) or produced as private writings with no intended circulation beyond the writer. It is also significant to note that while archival texts are generally understood
as “historical,” the wide variety in the time periods of their publications makes this a
near-impossible category for classification.

Primary and secondary sources in my work describe published documents that
circulated to public, or limited public audiences and are available without special access
to archival collections. For example, “primary sources” include two short articles written
by the owner of Monaghan Mills, Thomas Parker (“The South Carolina Cotton Mill
Village” and “The South Carolina Cotton Mill”). These sources provide the views of a
cotton mill owner and administrator that were originally published in the *South Atlantic
Quarterly* in 1909 and 1910, then combined and republished as a single document
independently. The publication data for this re-issue is not available (and in library
catalogues the text is listed as a “reprint”), though it seems likely that the text was printed
and circulated within cotton mill circles and perhaps not to the same general public that
the two essays reached through the *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

The boundaries between primary and archival texts is further blurred in the case
of newspapers, which are generally considered primary texts, but which in this project
were only accessible through archival spaces. For example, the *Southern Textile Bulletin*
(microfilm) and the *Durable-Durham Doings* (bound volume and digital copy) are both
circulars examined during my time in the North Carolina Collection at UNC and the
Rubenstein Library at Duke University. Although issues of the *STB* are located as a
whole body of work in the North Carolina Collection, clippings from the publication also
appeared in a handful of other collections, including the Erwin Mills Scrapbook. Thus,
while the issues do require special access, how they are represented creates slippage in
the ways texts are categorized that takes into account their original intent (as publicly
circulating documents in the case of the STB); “archival” becomes an adjective describing their location in this case more so than the type of artifact represented.

Lastly, secondary artifacts reference the historical work of other researchers and more generally writers, not based on first-hand experiences, which have been published. Due to the regional specificity of these documents, some secondary texts were accessed through particular archival collections dedicated to mill history, but they are not archival in the sense that they are publically available through other means. This further exemplifies the fluidity of the labels “archival,” “primary,” and “secondary,” which incorporate aspects of location, authorship, circulation, and access. For example, the Carolina Room of the Greenville Public Library houses several books about the Greenville mill industry including *Weaver of Dreams: “A History of Parker District,”* by Mary Ariail and Nancy Smith and published in 1977 by R. L. Bryan Company. Although this book was accessed through a special collection, it is available in print. Ariail and Smith’s book is an excellent example of the ways that being in a physical space devoted to a particular region (the Carolina Room focuses on South Carolina history and culture) may open avenues for research by bringing focused texts together. This was especially the case as the book was located on a shelf openly available to patrons alongside other texts of interest about the industry and city of Greenville.

**Conclusion**

As I embarked on this project, I implemented a materialist feminist praxis to help me approach my subject ethically and reflect on the uneven distribution of power between sponsors and learning in my research. Additionally, though, I sought to remain aware of power relations relating to the feminist guideposts of textual orientation,
researcher positioning, and representation of research in my own writing, which are considered throughout this chapter. This praxis allowed me to navigate the inevitable ups and downs in collecting archival artifacts, most notably providing a framework for considering how to represent mill women, whose voices proved so difficult to find. Thus, in conveying the methodologies and methods that guided my work, I hope to illustrate the value in feminist research not only for its orientation towards diversifying the kinds of questions we pursue, but also in the ways we pursue them.

Using techniques like tacking in, tacking out, and archival accretion, the research processes that contributed to this project incorporated both traditional archival practices and analysis procedures with the embodied and affectual experiences of conducting research on-site as an “outsider.” While hard to qualify, these latter opportunities impacted how I understood the texts I encountered in the archives and allowed me better conceptualize how community functioned within spaces where corporations strove to impact public and private life, but workers and their families maintained agency in their interactions with the mill and one another. Further, my experience suggests that, as archival work can perhaps be one of the more disembodied domains for academic work, there is much to gain when traditional methods come into contact with unconventional means: when we tack in and tack out during our processes.

The specific combination of experiences behind this project is unfortunately not always available to archival researchers, who are limited by institutional timetables and finances. The branching out in my research methods suggests that as feminist scholars we must continue to work towards ways that navigate gaps in our knowledge and resources as well as how these gaps exist. In addition, it suggests that we consider what might be
missing in our work both in terms of content or artifacts and in relation to affective knowledge. This attention to both outward and inward processes recognize the “multiple layers and dimensions [that] deserve our attention,” both in how we collect and analyze text and how we understand our own motivations and orientation in approaching academic work (Royster and Kirsch 75). Therefore, in this chapter, I have attempted to make clear the ways interacting with a variety of sources–textual and personal–all combined in my interpretations of mill literacy campaigns.
CHAPTER 3

‘HELP FOR BEGINNERS’: ECONOMIC SPONSORSHIP OF LITERACY ON THE MILL HILL

While most literacy studies focus on the local context for literacy or individual literacy learners (issues I take up in Chapter 5), I suggest a more productive place to begin if we seek to understand literacy materially is with economic literacy sponsors, who invest capital in literacy campaigns within specific communities. Within mill villages of the New South, particularly those surrounding “model” mills where larger sums of money were re-invested in the workers’ communities, mill owners and administrators served in this capacity, funding “welfare work” programs perceived to improve the social conditions of families who lived and labored on property owned and controlled by the mills. Most mill villages were unincorporated spaces under the jurisdiction of the private companies that owned them. These circumstances allowed the mill greater control over who lived in homes owned by the mill, what merchants were available within village limits, who policed the streets, preached to the people, and taught in the schools (MacDonald 25-32). Additionally, many company towns in the southern cotton industry, like similarly structured towns associated with the coal and timber industries, paid workers using company script. This village-specific form of currency was only redeemable at company stores, restricting the flow of economic capital within industry compounds and to venues approved by administration. Mill administration, then, often exerted significant control over the public lives of workers, as they managed these spaces and the circulation of capital within them.
Although it was welfare workers who actually taught literacy in many early company towns, this chapter seeks to unearth power relations behind the construction of social spaces. Mill owners and administrators are simultaneously the heroes and moguls of the New South, written as leaders, entrepreneurs, and even saviors of the devastated communities where they built their industry. They are also written as ruthless and exploitative in their business and social practices, knowingly paying low wages to workers in their factories while reaping extraordinary profit. The reality was likely somewhere in between; most owners of model mill villages both invested in their workers and made profits from their surplus labor and the family wage system in which multiple wage earners were required from each household for subsistence.12

This project does not strive to position mill owners and administrators on an ethical spectrum, but instead to better understand the ways they saw literacy function within the communities they built and maintained as part of the transition from agriculture to industry in the South. The move to the mill village marked a significant moment in many family histories of the thousands of workers who traveled to mill villages to begin new lives from rural farms and communities beginning in the late nineteenth century. Literacy sponsors made decisions within these spaces that impacted generations of learners, from the adult women and men who headed households and attended Night Schools to the children whose labor and incomes were pooled to support the material needs of their families. By exploring the ways sponsors presented their work

12 As many researchers have pointed out, the spectrum of living and working conditions in the southern textile industry is broad and it is impossible to generalize experiences of mill workers. This project focuses on archival, primary, and secondary sources relating to “model” mills, which often provided a higher quality of life and access to a greater number of resources than other, smaller mill villages. These mills also frequently left behind larger, formal archives. In this way, these experiences are not representative of all mill workers during this period.
publicly and privately, I unveil some of the complex motivations behind the distribution of literacies and how southern industrialists strove to control this distribution to achieve economic goals. Further, these public and private presentations complicate how literacy sponsors are often portrayed as benevolent. By adding the actual voices of sponsors, I critically examine the often thorny backstage of literacy sponsorship to further position literacy learning within a social and economic context, highlighting the circulation of capital on social and economic mobility.

To conduct such an examination, I developed a framework that understands “literacies” as resources, calling most directly on the work of Deborah Brandt and Rural Literacy Studies (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell, Edmondson). As discussed in Chapter 2, due to the nature of the sources traditionally archived in relation to welfare work in southern mill villages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the texts available for this study were almost exclusively produced by literacy sponsors. Thus, my research picks up questions about motivations behind literacy sponsorship: why are reading and writing practices made available to particular groups of people and not others (Brandt, Stuckey)? Additionally, what might we learn about alphabetic literacies for women when contextualized alongside skill-based courses in cooking, sewing, and housekeeping? Using a materialist feminist lens to address the “backstage” of sponsorship programs also invites an interrogation of ways the teaching of reading, writing, and textual navigation and the investment, circulation, and accumulation of forms of capital extend beyond the economic, to include social and cultural capital. This is important when studying the impact of literacy distribution within company towns where economic mobility was rarely a part of life for workers during the turn of the
century. My research suggests that the circulation of all three forms of capital were intertwined with literacy sponsorship and with the varied motivations sponsors articulated for supporting literacy campaigns.\textsuperscript{13}

In a capitalist economy, resources are created collectively to meet human needs and distributed disproportionately through communities (\textit{Profit} 32); if literacy is one of these resources, we must thus consider how communities constantly produce language and knowledge and how particular ways of reading and writing are distributed unevenly across a social-scape. By tracing the way literacies are distributed and function amongst groups of people, we may better understand the relationship within and between these groups. Brandt’s work with “literacy sponsorship”–and the studies that have followed–allows a jumping-off point for understanding these relationships in terms of capitalist economies. Literacy sponsorship allows us to think about the relationships formed around the exchange of literacies within mill villages, examining how literacies were believed to impact worker efficiency to increase the profits of factories; this belief directly positions literacy in conversations about methods of production within the New South. The turn in literacy instruction during the nineteenth century as part of the process of socializing industrial workers has been recognized in Composition and Rhetoric (Cook-Gumperz 26-28, Graff); my project returns to this shift to provide a closer view of what this process looked like within a particularly rich chapter of capitalist development in the southern US.

\textsuperscript{13} Although an extensive discussion defining economic, social, and cultural capital can be found in Chapter 4, economic capital is commonly associated with property and money, social capital manifests as the prestige and privileges associated with group membership (white privilege, for example), and cultural capital relates to knowledge and more broadly ways of knowing that may be displayed through scholastic achievement or the ability to perform certain tasks. These definitions are based on the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu.
Southern mill villages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer exceptionally ripe spaces for this kind of study, as their material and social spaces were highly influenced by the mill owners and administrators who built them to house workers. While workers certainly exhibited agency within the village, owners, sometimes local and sometimes from larger Northern mills, were highly influential in terms of the social, economic, and political happenings, with the power to purge families from these spaces who did not conform to social norms (Thompson 11). The instruction offered by “welfare work” in model mill villages was sanctioned by administrators in attempts to socialize rural workers into town life and was considered an economic investment with expected economic and social returns; this chapter unpacks what some economic sponsors in model mill villages expected from their investments.

This chapter uses archival, primary, and secondary research first to illustrate how some mills utilized stereotypes of Appalachian whites circulating in popular culture to describe newly arrived workers from the rural south. As constructions of Appalachians emphasized poverty (deficits in economic capital), ignorance (deficits in cultural capital), and “backwards” ways (deficits in social capital), the mill industry positioned itself as a source of improving the economic and social status of tenant farmers and other rural

14 Additional examples can be found in John C. Mason’s Diary, archived in the Cannon Mills papers at Duke University, pages 6-7 and 8, in which employees are let go for drunkenness and asked to either stop housing hogs in their mill-village home or leave the village.

15 There are ways in which the labeling of mill administrators as merely “economic” sponsors simplifies their role in the literacy campaigns they supported within their villages. It is a fairly common critique of administration, for example, that they controlled the content that preachers paid by the mills preached to workers, as well as the information transmitted within the schools, suggesting an investment in social and cultural capital as well as economic. This project does not provide evidence that mill owners did or did not hand-selected materials and ideologies passed to workers through literacy learning, but it is worth mentioning that it is not likely that ideas that challenged the mill owners were taught in the early mill village. On the contrary, more aggressive teaching materials do appear to have been present in later worker literacy campaigns beginning in the mid to late 1920’s, often accompanying attempts to unionize mill workers.
whites, creating ideological space for the industry within the rhetoric of white racial uplift and modernization. In the final sections of this chapter, I then turn more fully to the ways mill administrators forwarded literacy learning campaigns in relation to the accumulation of economic capital, as they framed welfare work as an investment in worker efficiency and company profits. Further, I suggest that the circulation of alphabetic texts, which framed women as household consumers and encouraged participation in consumer culture, also impacted the accumulation and circulation of economic capital on the mill hill. In this way, I suggest that material and social conditions associated with mill labor and life in the company town restricted access for many workers to schooled literacies; although many villages did offer literacy training that had a positive impact on workers and their families, limitations point to Elspeth Stuckey's claims that literacy access may also reproduce social violence by reproducing class stratification.

Mountains in the Mill Hills: Constructions of the “Mountain Problem” and the Mountaineer in the Mills

As members of the Southern Appalachian population packed up their wagons and moved, or were moved by company funds, to textile mills often located in the neighboring Piedmont regions, the discursive constructions of the mountaineer teased out in Chapter 1 followed them. Although John Campbell, who studied Appalachian culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, suggests that only a small minority of “mountaineers” made up the large population of Southern mill workers (“From Mountain to Cabin” 9-10), texts published by The Southern Textile Bulletin, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and numerous studies of the mills, suggest that many workers were constructed in publicly circulating texts as hailing from mountain
regions. It can be difficult to tease out differences between mountain whites and other white rural workers drawn into the mills, though it appears from archival work that the image of the mountaineer seemed to hold a particular romance as (s)he moved into industrial labor. Louise McLauren, writing of the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry in 1930, states: “As soon as the highlander becomes an industrial worker … he no longer stands for the romantic life of our forefathers, but he becomes a ‘problem’ and the sympathy and kinship felt for him on the part of the average American outside the mountains are likely to vanish under the pressure of economic interests and class feeling” (2). While McLauren’s work is published a decade after the scope of this study, the sentiment she describes in the transition from mountaineer/highlander to lint head echoes those from the beginnings of Southern industrialization. It is also significant that the “nostalgic projection[s] of the rural family … would become an unquestioned trope” in advertising to represent “the ‘traditional American family’” during the turn of the century (Lovett 79). Thus, rural whites from the southern mountains represented a heightened public sense of the differences between rural and urban life as well as a site of contact between middle-class nostalgia for the “simple life” of the frontier and a growing concern over the material realities of everyday life in social systems on the periphery of industrial and consumer capitalist culture.

Administrators harnessed the mountaineer of the public imagination in an effort to raise economic and social capital, positioning mills as providing a public service as they uplifted rural whites through village life. Cotton mills provided a solution to concerns around the “mountain problem”: just as low-wage employers today are praised for bringing much-needed jobs into communities, southern mills were praised for providing
rural workers with paid labor and other resources. It is for these reasons that my project does not strive to identify merely who was Appalachian and who was not within particular spaces or how this identity differed from that of other rural workers. Instead, my interest lies in the ways already-circulating images were reproduced and maintained within mill discourse for the rhetorical purpose of accumulating capital for literacy sponsors and the economic rewards resulting from perceived investment in employees as well as the social and political support in exchange for providing resources for the poor rural whites. This function fed on the resurgence of white supremacy after Reconstruction in its emphasis on the racial identity (and segregation) of workers as well as racial anxieties over the large numbers of immigrants entering the US during the turn of the century, drawing on nostalgia and the search for an “American race … whose character had been shaped by their experiences in the American environment” (Lovett Conceiving 111, see also Plein 101-104).

Perceptions of this isolation—geographic, social, cultural, and economic—were perpetuated by local color and travel writers fed into these concerns, as gestured towards in Chapter 1. These writers, some of the best known including William Harney, John Fox, Jr., and William Frost, portrayed the region as the well-cited “nodule of amygadaloid,” preserved by geologic and geographic structures, untouched by the eras that developed the urban centers of the east coast (Harney 46). Thus, Appalachia provided a nostalgic space in which stories of European white settlers were revisited in literary and non-fiction accounts during the period following the Civil War as the nation strove to create a united identity (Plein 101-102). Forming the Southern Appalachian region in opposition to mainstream US (urban, Northern) culture created an ideological
setting in which growing industry in the region was framed as “saving” the population from isolation and subsistent farms (Banks 322), bringing paid labor and other resources. Meanwhile, industries extracted raw materials including coal, timber, and labor power from the Southern mountains to fuel the industrialization that took hold of the US following the Civil War. Although historical recovery work suggests “nineteenth-century Appalachian regions and communities, when carefully scrutinized, resemble in fundamental ways regions and communities elsewhere in the United States,” these discursive constructions of place and people contributed to the “separate and unequal histories” of the region and the exploitation of land and labor that make up much of this experience (Billings, Pudup, and Waller 13-14). In addition, the rhetorics of deficit that were built around the region starting in the mid-nineteenth century followed residents migrating from mountain to mill, were utilized by mill administrators and welfare workers, among others, to rally support for industrialization and welfare work within mill villages.

To take a closer look at how the “mountaineer” was constructed in relation to industry, let us start with William Frost, who described the people he met in the Southern mountain region in his 1899 article in The Atlantic as having just awoken from “a Rip Van Winkle sleep” (92). Frost notes that the women there still practiced the “Saxon arts” of spinning (98), which had long-before been industrialized in the northern states from which Frost hailed before he became President of Berea College in 1892. In this way, the women (and their families) were positioned as humble and homely, their position outside of the mainstream industrialist capitalist economy limiting their economic and social class, with few opportunities to change their position. To further emphasize the deficits of
life in the mountains, the educator referenced the region and its people as the “ward of the nation” (106) and “in need of a friendly interpreter” (92), especially in regards to the wealth of geological resources within the region that brought “ruthless change … knocking at the door” through the entrance of extractive industries (105). Frost likens the future of Appalachians to the story of Native Americans (“Indians”) who had once inhabited the same mountains as he closes his essay, advocating for the mountaineer to adapt or be extracted (105). The publication of Frost’s essay in 1899 came at the end of one of many violent decades (making up several violent centuries) in the history of the North American Indians at the hands of white “progress.” Now, the white settlers who once forced Native tribes out of their homes were targets of a less violent ideological turn to make clear the perception of power backing the forces of industrialization; “progress” was unstoppable and the mountaineer could be an ally or an enemy.

Instead of imagining alternative futures, other writers echoed this sentiment, including James Allen, who claimed in 1892 that mountaineers could either leave the mountains or “be roused, civilized, and developed” with the entrance of industry to their communities (73). These depictions again frame the region’s people in terms of deficit in all forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—to zero in on the ways the mountaineer’s geological resources remained untapped because of the ignorance and underdevelopment of the people and communities that had formed there. Allen’s account goes on to express the hegemonic value of economic capital via absence, as residents appeared “abjectly poor and … to have no sense of accumulation” as practiced in mainstream capitalist economics (66). In this way, as residents often had little access to the circulation of cash, they were also written as having little or no access to the cultural
and social capital necessary to participate in the larger US economy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Strangely, Allen complicates this portrait to align the region with the international Ginseng trade with China (67), emphasizing the labor of women and children who “appear to do most of the work” (69). This observation places families in contrast to contemporary gender roles of middle-class white families along the eastern seaboard, as the gathering labor of women and children brought income through international markets. Even in these moments when the Appalachian region is situated within a global trade circuit, it is done so not through the hard work of capable men, but through the pre-industrial work of women and children. Instead of these observations suggesting different regional structures defining gender and labor to highlight the social nature of ascribed characteristics, they fed into ideological battles over access to the resources in the Appalachian region; resources for which Appalachian residents had few ways to protect beyond the use of their guns, as Samuel Johnson, an Appalachian himself, pointed out in 1908 (184).

The image of the deficient “mountaineer” became yoked to the bountiful mill village most directly in the writings of the mill industry itself, as exhibited in the following portrait from the October 16, 1919 edition of The Southern Textile Bulletin and archived in the Erwin Mills papers at Duke University. The account is transcribed from a speech given to the Industrial Council in Washington D.C. and cues within the speech and its placement in the Bulletin suggest its audience was primarily business men involved in the industry:
these people [workers], who came out of the mountains—good Anglo-Saxons, the best people in the world, who had spent their lives in the mountains for centuries and have not been polluted by living in cities like you men have (laughter)—[…] these people had no idea of hygiene or science of caring for their health, or anything like that. They had been used to going rabbit hunting, living 15 or 20 in a house and having big families, unless, perchance, the chimney fell down and killed them off— and making mad moonshine liquor. The fact of the matter was they could not haul enough corn to town to feed the calf, but if they could make it into liquor, and make a little money out of it, that was a perfectly natural thing for them to do. (“Callaway Gives” np)

This depiction highlights several stereotypes of the area: deficits in economic and social capital indicated by bad hygiene and living conditions (stereotypes with large implications for women, who were considered the keepers of the domestic space); poverty; subsistence living; and moonshining. In addition, a deficit in cultural capital is also referenced via the mismanagement of resources indicated by the use of corn for liquor production instead of livestock feed.¹⁶ The (re)construction of the mountaineer-turned-mill-worker, full of “good [white] Anglo-Saxon” blood but lacking capital and common sense, illustrates the complex social space the mountaineer occupied for the American public: the mountaineer was white and privileged but uncivilized and unable (or unwilling) to keep up with a changing nation.

Finally, Lewis Parker, who owned mills in the Greenville, South Carolina region, also constructs workers as mountaineers in his 1909 essay, “Conditions of Labor in the

¹⁶ Although illegal, the use of corn for moonshine was often much more profitable than selling it as a commodity in and of itself.
Southern Cotton Mills.” Specifically, Parker claims that in 1900 most of the workers in South Carolina were from the mountains of the state itself as well as Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, where “they lived in the most primitive style, and had few advantages socially and educationally” (55). Thus, when moving to the mill village, families had to learn to shift from living in isolation as individuals to living within a community (L. Parker 55). This shift was accomplished through kindergartens, mill nurses who taught health and hygiene, night schools, and other programs implemented by the YWCA and Y.M.C.A.–all specifically referenced by Parker–to address deficits in cultural and social capital through formal, organized schooling for children and adults (56). In the case of Greenville, South Carolina, clusters of large mill complexes including Parker Mill (owned by Lewis Parker), Monaghan Mill (co-owned by Lewis and his cousin Thomas Parker), Poe Mill, and Mills Mill, among others, required large numbers of workers to operate and often relied heavily on the surrounding rural and mountain regions to supply the labor power necessary to run machinery. Constructing the needs of the mountaineer around the accumulation of capital necessary in a capitalist economy allowed mill administrators to use stock characters as a part of the complex ideological work that accompanied the process of industrializing a land previously devoted to Jefferson’s agricultural ideals (L. Parker 54).

It is useful to take a moment here to further tease out constructions of mountain women and industry, as their depictions were much less frequent in local color and travel writing, though provide the basis for this project. Perhaps because most local color and travel writers during the second half of the nineteenth century were male, their depictions typically rendered mountain woman virtually invisible, with the occasional exception of
“pretty mountain girls” like those referenced by John Fox, Jr. in 1901 (134-135, see also Frost and Allen). Frost’s 1899 accounts of Appalachian women tie them to the region itself, noting that the women express a deep love for their families and homes and feel homesick when they are away (101-102). These observations placed women within the domestic sphere of the Cult of Domesticity, one of the primary ideologies ruling gender roles during the nineteenth century in mainstream US culture that was not necessarily reflective of gender roles within the southern mountains (Dunaway *Women* 124). Thus, they applied an ideological lens that was hegemonic in the lives of readers, but not necessarily in the lives of the people under examination.

In such brief and flat accounts, women inhabit the background; although we see them participating in paid and unpaid labor in some accounts (collecting ginseng in Allen and spinning in Frost), for the most part their presence is unremarkable. It is in slightly later writings published by Thomas Dawley Jr. in 1910 and 1912 after traveling through the Southern Appalachian region that perceptions of deficit prove equally present in depictions of women from the area. Dawley provides detailed descriptions of populations living in the mountains as well as those living and working in nearby mill villages. As a journalist from New England, Dawley self-published his work on the region to prove that people living in the southern mountains were better off in the newly established mill villages than on their mountain farms; he did this by conjuring such characters as “the shrunken, tobacco-juiced, whiskey-steeped old cabin dweller” (*The Child* 408) and his accompanying “old crone, sitting by the fireplace, spitting tobacco-juice” (“Our Southern Mountaineers” 12705). Certainly Dawley encountered some of these characters and my purpose is not to deny his observations of their validity. But Dawley’s (re)creation of the
backwards “mountaineer” in relation to the growing mill industry, along with the public circulation of his texts, are indicative of the ways hegemonic discourses around the New South assigned value to particular lifestyles and methods of production.

Dawley’s portrayal of women highlights the formation of a habitus for poor-working class women, as his descriptions (re)produce differences in the “taste” and style exhibited by women of Appalachia and those of the white middle-class that likely made up his readership. For example, according to the report, poor Appalachian women did not own modern amenities like “a looking-glass, a wash-basin, or a comb” (“Our Southern” 12706). This deficit located women outside of material and consumer culture—and outside of contemporary beauty and hygienic standards—positioning them as gendered “others.” Ideologically speaking, this also situated women in opposition to the rising tide of industrialization; as opposed to posing alternate ways of living on an equal plane, the lives of Appalachian women were positioned on a social hierarchy as less valuable than hegemonic practices. These portrayals indicated that Appalachian women lacked economic, social, and cultural capital to participate in changes in women’s social roles during the turn of the century, embodied in movements like the “New Woman.” These shifts included greater access to educational opportunities as well as the increased targeting of women as consumers. This latter shift emphasized material culture in the lives of working and middle class women manifested by changes in female fashion that included the popularity of shirtwaists and long skirts suitable for both the workplace and leisure activities (“What is a Shirtwaist?,” “Image and Lifestyle”). Photographs of mill

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17 It is significant to note that Dawley did find socio-economic class variation within the mountains, geographically dispersed with poorer families located on the mountain ridges and families with more access to capital in the valleys (The Child 198, 202).
women wearing this “uniform” of the New Woman visually illustrate their transformation upon entering mill communities from the “crone” of Dawley’s accounts to the modernized woman, whose life was enriched by the mill village and welfare work.

Fig. 3: Y.W.C.A. Social and Game Room 1904. Monaghan Mills Y.W.C.A. Scrapbook. YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

The last account I will highlight of Appalachian women and labor comes from a woman who spent much of her life living in the region itself, Emma Miles. Miles’ 1905 book, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, was based on her experiences in eastern Kentucky and Tennessee. Having moved to the mountains as a young child, Miles observed that women in the Southern Appalachians held “position[s of] sacrifice, sacrifice, and ever sacrifice,” caring for the home and the family and often living in relative isolation (70). Miles also
emphasized the relationship between women and the domestic sphere, stating that only women appreciate the physical mark of tools left on household items like tables and chairs, material indicators of the ancestry from which Miles imagines women find strength (65, see also 67-68). In this way, “the woman belongs to the race, to the old people” while the man “is part of the young nation” (Miles 69). These gendered distinctions are especially interesting given the increased interest in the revival of Appalachian craft culture in the early twentieth century. This movement has been critiqued by scholars including David Whisnant as a cultural shift to divert public attention to particular commodifications of mountain culture at the expense of recognizing how the region was highly exploited by industry.

Although the portrayals of women Miles shares fail to “think in complicated ways about the social hierarchies that intersect and shape individual lives” (Engelhardt 3), she does create an image of women within the region that complicates many depictions from the same period. Instead of portraying households as spaces of deficit, Miles fills them with culture and the perpetuation of ancestral practices to which she attributes value, even if it is a nostalgic one. This move manifests claims by Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar to situate the teaching of ethnicity and peoplehood within the household and the sphere of “women’s work” in hegemonic culture (Wallerstein “The Ideological Tensions” 33-35 and “The Construction” 83, Balibar 102-103). In this way, women are attributed with not only the material reproduction of the labor force through the birthing and raising of children, but also the social reproduction of labor in the (re)creation of culture and transmission of ideology (Wallerstein “Household” 108-109). This positioning of women in rural Appalachia speaks to the findings of Linda Frankel’s 1986 dissertation, titled
“Women, Paternalism, and Protest in a South Carolina Textile Community: Henderson, NC, 1900-1960,” which claims: “studies of working class communities have shown that it is primarily women who have built the extensive support networks necessary to ensure family survival under difficult conditions” (25). In this way, as women are tied to physical, cultural, and social reproduction, we begin to see that in connecting them to deficiency in capital in depictions like Dawley’s, implications spread beyond individual women to their families and communities. As women’s household labor “absorbed the shocks of an economy that was neither self-sufficient nor completely reliant on factory goods” in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Anglin “Lives on the Margin” 196), it was also tightly connected to how Appalachian and mill populations were viewed socially and culturally. While this analysis will be picked up again in Chapter 4, it is sufficient to note that white women in the Appalachian region (and later in the cotton mill villages) were ideologically connected to household practices, concepts of community, and the perpetuation of group identity, putting great weight on the way their familial roles were conceptualized by mill administrators, welfare workers, and the general public.

The liberal ideologies that we see reflected in Miles’ romanticism, likely impacted by her travels and time spent at art school at the age of 20 (Gaston), were also reflected in the flood of cultural workers and settlement schools that moved into the Appalachian region in the early twentieth century in response to white rural poverty (the “mountain problem”). As cultural workers, often middle class white educated women, entered communities to “preserve” traditional mountain culture in the face of the extraordinary social and economic changes that the turn of the century and extractive industries brought to some areas, “their emphasis on culture served both to undermine native traditions as
well as to divert attention from an economic agenda–wide sweeping programs of resource mapping and extraction—already under way” (Anglin “A Question” 106). Miles’ accounts of mountain life are tempered by warnings that industrialization will destroy the subsistence lifestyles of the people living there (194-196, 198), but her observations uphold the binary between “traditional” and “modern” lifestyles that positioned white Appalachian women on one end of a spectrum far away from white women living middle-class urban lives.

**From Barren Places to Light: The Role of the Mill in the Uplift of the Rural Mountain White**

Images of the “mountaineer”—male and female—seeped into mill villages located in areas of North and South Carolina along the edge of the southern Appalachian region, perpetuating the stock characters that carried with them public interest and concern. Mills closer to the mountains predictably had higher numbers of workers who hailed from mountain farms in nearby states, mixing with rural whites from the Piedmont and Tidewater regions of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and farther south from Georgia and Alabama, all seeking paid labor and the amenities offered in many mill villages. As the “mountaineer” had by the early twentieth century become a regular and recognized character in popular literature (Plein 112), the stereotypes associated with Appalachian deficit were harnessed to emphasize how the industry could “solve” the “mountain problem” of rural white poverty, providing economic, social, and cultural capital to workers and their families within company towns. In this way, mill villages were understood not only in economic terms, as reviving the devastated Southern economy after the Civil War and Reconstruction, but also in social terms, bringing culture and
civilization to the workers who came on their own accord or were recruited from nearby areas to turn cotton into thread and cloth (MacDonald 16-17). These intertwined conditions—the economic and the social—are necessary to understanding the way literacy sponsorship was conceptualized within mill villages, as campaigns to teach workers literacy were presented as both a way to improve the lives of workers but also to improve the methods of production within the mills, increasing the profits of literacy sponsors. The continuation of the image of the “mountaineer” in documents describing mill life and circulated publically and privately served a valuable function in the building of the New South, emphasizing the value of the industry as it not only produced material commodities, but efficient, reliable employees from the raw material of the southern mountain farm family.

The speed with which the mill industry took its place in the economy and social structure of the New South is important to understand as we consider the ways the industry was framed. In the archived speech to the Industrial Conference in Washington, DC from 1919 cited above, the industry is described as “a sort of contagious disease, like the measles” (“Calloway Gives” 13), emphasizing the quick and seemingly uncontrolled spread of mills along the southern textile crescent. Ben Lemert gestures to a variety of reasons why the Southern Appalachian Piedmont (which encompasses the mill belt through the Carolinas) was an ideal site for industrialization. Written in 1933 after the industry’s heyday, Lemert points out the rich geographic features of the region, including water power, cheap timber, and access to coal (7, 9, 39, 99-102, 175), which supported and sustained mills. In addition, he claims workers from the Appalachian region, “where [they] have been reared on fat back, corn bread, and molasses” (8) were “glad to accept
any conditions which improve those to which [they had] been accustomed” (63). The “mountaineer” provided the ideal worker for industrial labor: (s)he was used to long hours of hard, manual labor on farms, crowded and impoverished living conditions, and to a family labor system in which children’s work was necessary for survival. The exploitation of the mill village seemed a lesser evil than living off the low-producing land.

Lemert’s analysis makes it clear that workers who both sought out mills on their own and were recruited by agents sent into the mountains by the industry were considered a valuable “natural” resource, making the southern Piedmont and mountain regions ideal spaces to build industry. Wilma Dunaway reminds us that the poverty in Appalachian regions has historically been high, often as a result of the uneven distribution of land (frequently favoring absent land-owners) and later uneven industrial development (“Speculators” 51-52, 62-63, 67-68). Lemert and others make these sources of poverty invisible when advocating for industry in the region, emphasizing the ways it was understood to alleviate—not perpetuate—social and economic inequality. Texts circulating that depicted workers as resources contributed to the process of commodity fetishism as defined in regards to the Appalachian region by Allen Batteau to describe the way social relations between people became relations between objects and more specifically how capitalist production “enlist[ed] all forms of reality into the profit system, and all social forms into the production of commodities” (11). Thus, as Appalachian whites entered the mills, the relations of production in which they participated swallowed their presence in the social landscape. Just as coal existed not in a
larger ecosystem but as a source for fuel, families existed as labor power for the growing (and highly profitable) mill industry.

The influx of cotton mills to the southern piedmont and mountain regions were an attempt to reorder the southern economy after the end of slavery and a collapsed agricultural economy, based off of the free labor of blacks brought in bondage to the United States. While Allen Tullos points out that black labor still made up the backbone of the mill industry (12), few blacks were actually employed within the mills beyond janitorial work and jobs unpacking cotton until the Civil Rights Movement; with few exceptions, early southern mill work was white work. This racing was intentional and a move of white supremacist ideologies that took hold of much of the South following Reconstruction, as Jim Crow Laws began to strip African Americans of the right they were granted after the Civil War, creating tensions between white and black laborers that kept blacks in the fields while whites moved into newly created mill jobs. In a footnote in his published article, “The South Carolina Cotton Mill–A Manufacturer’s View,” from 1909, Thomas Parker described Reconstruction in his state as “the twelve years during which the negroes, led by white adventurers, ruled the State,” going on to describe the economic and social devastation that the end of the War and Reconstruction period left upon South Carolina (13-14). As mills were built in the region, by both Northern industries seeking cheap labor and Southern merchant entrepreneurs, they brought with them increased economic prosperity for the region as Parker outlines (14-15); but while

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18 This racial segregation was not the case in all industries, as exhibited in the history of southern timber mills and timber mill villages. According to Chris Mahin, in 1910 the southern timber industry in the US employed over 262,000 employees, of which African Americans made up over 50%. Further, in the 1910’s as the industry began to organize, workers came together across racial lines to advocate for their collective rights. For an account of race and unionization within the industry, see Mahin’s “Timber Worker Solidarity.”
this prosperity certainly impacted many, the bulk of the wealth fell into the pockets of mill administrators, who in turn offered low-paying jobs and scattered social benefits to white workers.

Globally, historical work situates the growth of the Southern mill industry in context with international movements of textile production to less developed parts of the world, shifting from the Northern to the Southern US and from Great Britain to India, Brazil, and Japan (Carlton and Conclanis 153-155, 159-160). Thus, economic competition for cheaper methods of production found in areas like the Southern United States where unions had yet to organize workers was a driving force in this shift to peripheral sites of production.\(^{19}\) While the “invisible hand” of the market impacted the placement of the industry within the region, ideological work eased the transition from agriculture to industry through the framework of “progress,” as middle class urban consumer lifestyles were valued more than the rural, subsistence and quasi-subsistence lives attributed to the southern mountains. The perception of social and economic good that industrialization brought to rural whites was not only to uplift families from poverty, but their communities as a whole, as southern states strove to regain a sense of identity in the quickly changing US society. While the mountaineer represented a nostalgic past, the United States was working its way towards a future as a global super power; the need for the material and labor resources within the southern mountains required drastic changes in parts of the region to support industrial efforts. As the mountaineer’s material needs were framed as easily and cheaply met–and improved–by mill villages, (s)he became an

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\(^{19}\) Carlton and Conclanis also note that early Southern textiles were not major competitors on the international market, mostly being sold within the US (164-166), but they did mirror a movement to peripheral sites of production.
additional resource for operation of mills in the area. The skills and ways of life that the 
public attributed to white Appalachians were not seen as compatible with those necessary 
for life in more “developed” spaces; many mills took on the social work of helping 
workers move into consumer capitalist economies that relied more on the circulation of 
cash than the kinship networks that sustained many rural communities (Eller 210, 227).

Perhaps some of the best illustrations of this relationship in regards to Southern 
Appalachian workers are found by returning to writings by Thomas Dawley, Jr. As 
briefly mentioned in the previous section, Dawley recorded his findings from trips 
through the southern mountains and textile crescent in a short essay entitled “Our 
Southern Mountaineers: Removal the Remedy for the Evils That Isolation and Poverty 
Have Brought: Some Results of a First-Hand Investigation,” published in the March 10, 
The Story of a Government Investigation that was Suppressed, published at least in part 
with the author’s own funds in 1912 (The Child ix). Dawley’s extensive writings and 
photographs of both mountain and mill provide an incredible amount of information 
about both social spaces, which he considered it his duty to share with US readers, even 
after he was denied the ability to do so by the federal government and stripped of his 
research data (and funding) in the process (The Child vii, ix).

A New York Times article from January 1913 tells us that Dawley’s work was 
historically situated in response to a plea for governmental investigations of child labor 
conditions in 1907 (ICH 10), a point made clear by Dawley’s insistence that upon failing 
to find children laboring under harsh conditions in the mills of North and South Carolina, 
the federal government dismissed his study and stopped funding his work (The Child
484-487). In fact, in the preface to the second edition of his book, Dawley explains that he resigned from his position after being told he could not make the results of his study public, “setting forth in writing that when it came to a matter of sacrificing a principle affecting the welfare of perhaps five million of our people, in order to meet the requirements of a salaried office, there remained but one thing for me to do, and that was sacrifice the office” (The Child viii). The consistent lack of bad working conditions—at least as far as the reporter observed20—combined with the observed behaviors of mill children not employed in the mills (“running around railroad tracks, puffing on cigarettes”) led Dawley to conclude that industrial labor was a better fix for social problems including poverty, ignorance, and laziness than schooling (The Child 23, see also 93). In fact, Dawley explicitly prescribes mills in opposition to schools for educating rural mountain Southerners several times, concluding that keeping children out of the mills was a “great wrong being done [to] a class of very poor people, our own people” (The Child 490). In claiming Appalachians and mill workers as “our own people,” he emphasized the constructed identity of the population as Anglo-Saxon and as having a natural position within contemporary society that could only be realized through industry.

After investigating the mills, Dawley’s reporting took him into the Southern mountain region itself, to discover the living conditions of families within mill villages before their move into these industrial spaces. Drawing upon common constructions of the population stemming from texts in the mid-nineteenth century, Dawley not only (re)created a portrait of Appalachia pocked with poverty and idleness, he also fed into a

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20 A regular critique of studies like Dawley’s is that they focused on model mill villages, highlighting only particular aspects of the hugely diverse industry in the South. This is articulated in the June 3, 1915 edition of the Southern Textile Bulletin, as the industry is accused of intentionally selecting particular model mills to illustrate good working conditions to government inspectors and the media (“The Clark Testimony” 5).
growing body of discursive constructions devoid of individual experiences and diversity. Although extensive circulation statistics on Dawley’s work are not available, in the same New York Times article referenced above, we find some indication of how ideas from his publications were taken up in the public sphere:

[Dawley] found not only that the men and women from the mountain districts were densely ignorant, but that they had been almost invariably improved by their change of residence and occupation; that the industrious among them were successful, that the idle and vicious were in no worse plight, but were really in better condition in the mills than they had been on the mountain farms, where they had always lived a hopeless life; that the ‘poor whites’ from the mountain districts were brought into closer touch with schools and churches and other agencies of civilization; in a word, that the movement from the mountains to the mills had been of a very distinct advantage, generally speaking, and specifically in a number of well authenticated cases, to the mill workers and their families. (JCH 10)

In the eyes of the public, associations between the “mountaineer” and the “lint head” were articulated through these texts, emphasizing a relationship in terms of “peoplehood”–or shared history and identity–between the populations. “JCH” also illustrates clearly that although Dawley briefly acknowledges a class system within the Appalachians (The Child 198, 202), for many readers, the presence of difference within the region was erased to simplify both southern Appalachians and mill workers and their experiences. This simplification set lifestyles and economies of the southern mountains fully in opposition to the industrial and consumer capitalist practices becoming
hegemonic by the early twentieth century. Without the civilizing effects of mill village life, the mountaineer “lived a hopeless life” and while alternative solutions to rural white poverty (and the poverty of African American, immigrant, and Native American populations in the southern mountains) may have existed, most saw the solution as industrial.21

As textile production across the globe moved to more peripheral sites of production to find cheaper labor and production costs, texts like Dawley’s helped to ideologically pave the way for the industry in the South. Interestingly though, while this was done in part by an appeal to the recognized need of improving southern economies after the changes following the War between the States and Reconstruction, it was also done though the simultaneous construction of rural southern whites as a “natural” resource for industry and the use of pathos in portraying populations including the “mountaineer” to a public audience. In the face of the “half starved bodies … begrimed faces[.] and partially clothed bodies draped in filthy rags” (The Child ix) it is no wonder that industries offering a cash income, housing, and other amenities to rural populations were welcomed into many communities; although the portraits created by Dawley and others likely illustrated some creative license, the mill village was a haven for some—though perhaps not all—families. It was the notion of a haven that model villages strove to project as they rose to meet the material needs of their workers as well as those of the larger white population in the southern US.

21 It is significant to mention here that John and Olive Campbell, among other cultural workers, led movements to preserve southern mountain culture in the wake of industrialization through Settlement Schools.
Fueling the Fire: Literacy and Methods of Production in the Mills

Given the dynamic economic and social climate of the southern mill industry’s entrance into the region, the case of literacy sponsorship within model mill villages in the Carolinas suggests a spectrum of economic and social motivations. Thus, while mills and their supporters framed workers as needing salvation—and mill labor and villages as the source of this salvation—published and archived documents produced by administrators and others involved in mill literacy campaigns make it clear profit motive was a significant, if not determining, factor in instituting welfare work. As newly arrived workers and their families found themselves living in closer proximity to neighbors and experiencing new forms of labor in the mill villages, the transition into town life was one many mills financially invested in to produce a sense of community, increase worker retention and efficiency, and ensure reliance on mill support to breakdown traditional kinship networks (Hall et al 264, see also Eller). In this way, while the availability of some resources increased for workers entering the village, welfare work and the structure of village spaces (re)produced social and economic class in a manner that benefited the industry and perpetuated the exploitation of workers. Literacy learning was embedded in these processes, as educated workers were thought to be more efficient and more committed to staying in their community.

Bess Beatty’s archival work on the Holt family, who were very successful in the North Carolina mill industry, emphasizes the Janus-faced nature of mill owners and administrators in their motivations for investing in welfare work in mill villages. The discrepancies identified between the paternalism exhibited by the mill industry’s public face and the entrepreneurial spirit in “private sources intended for a limited audience …
where the industrialists could drop the facade and portray realistically their economic priorities and the conflicts they had with their employees” (Beatty 490) are prevalent in documents surrounding the textile South, as the industry stressed different interests to different audiences. Texts circulating publicly provided “a major propaganda source for promoting the image of mill owners as benevolent philanthropists and of workers as docile and contented dependents,” sources which have made up many previous studies of mill history (Beatty 487-488). This propaganda, in conversation with private documents like those produced by the Holts and others, illustrates the complexity of the public and private presentations of industry, as mill administrators understood the ways in which their constructions of workers, Appalachian or not, impacted the reception of textile mills within the South and individual communities.

Additional writings by mill administrators and welfare workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries support Beatty’s findings to further reconstruct how the moral move to “rescue” poor, rural whites was undergirded by economic values and the expectation of returns on investments of capital, economic or otherwise. For example, Thomas Parker, the president of Monaghan Mills in Greenville, SC stated directly: “The immense influence of the mills for good in the state [of South Carolina] has been only incidental to making money for their stockholders, and that the building of churches and schools in the villages and contributing to their support by the corporations was largely a business necessity” (“The South Carolina Cotton Mill Village” 2). The short essay from which this quote originated was published in the South Atlantic Quarterly in 1910, the same year as Dawley’s essay, “Our Southern Mountaineers”; thus, it should be of little surprise that both men call upon the mills as the resolve for the
South’s social and economic (mountaineer) woes. Parker uses the logic of capital accumulation in the final pages of his article, as he assures mill stockholders that to invest in the infrastructure of industrial villages is to invest in their state, the returns being financial, through increased worker efficiency, and social, through increased overall well-being of their state (8-9). Parker blends the ideology of industrial paternalism illustrated in the previous section, in which industry offers a “voluntary and unselfish social service to its workers, to the community, and to the state,” with the unwavering understanding that “such welfare work … blesses giver and receiver … and when united with other necessary good business management must not only be financially profitable, but also must raise manufacturing to a higher plane” (“The SC Cotton Mill Village” 8).

Unlike Dawley, who locates the salvation of the mountaineer solely in industrial labor, Thomas Parker does seem to embrace Progressive ideologies that formal education is also a necessity for creating better citizens from illiterate and otherwise ignorant laborers. As we see in the above passages, though, Parker’s sponsorship of such programs for mill workers presented both a benevolent and business-minded front. For example, in the same text, Parker explains further: “any illiterate child who goes to the average village school for a year is thereby increased in mill efficiency, besides being made a better citizen in general; and what the school does for the child, other agencies can do for young men and women in the village” (“The SC Cotton Mill Village” 3). He then goes on to claim, “these villagers as a result of their former isolation have everything to learn. Their children and youth have literally to be taught any organized game, and the housekeeper, in fact the entire village, is equally in need of similar ‘help for beginners’” (“The SC Cotton Mill Village” 4). This sentiment echoes Thomas Parker’s cousin and
business partner, Lewis Parker, who explains: “in order to secure the development of the industry which is desired, it is necessary first to develop and educate employees” (“Conditions” 56). The mills needed workers while the workers needed mills.

As outlined in the previous section, the mountaineer-laborer is (re)constructed in a rhetorical move to couple an image of deficit with potential for investors who were aware that populations from the southern Appalachians were moving to cotton mills looking for work. Further, both Parkers express confidence that through increased literacies—both alphabetic and social—mills increase the quantity and quality of production. Lewis Parker proudly cites an “enormous increase of the industry in recent years, but also … the character of the work” in his mills with the shift from “courser grades of cotton … [to] finer cloths and yarns” and printed cloths during the first decade of the twentieth century (57). Instruction from the YWCA and YMCA, who coordinated welfare work for both Parkers (T. Parker, “The South Carolina Cotton Mill” 7 and L. Parker, “Conditions” 56) received high accolades in their programs to “train and perfect” the “stragglers” who entered the mills for work (T. Parker, “The South Carolina Cotton Mill” 9). As examined in the next chapter, the work of these institutions attended primarily to the presentation of habitus within mill villages, exhibiting the belief that attention to the social and domestic lives of workers and their families would bring both local and national betterment, economically and socially.

The rhetoric of benevolence exists alongside that of economy in the writings of the Parkers and others, muddying the waters of a purely economic motive. This Progressive approach is more pronounced in Thomas Parker’s essay, as he identifies welfare work as “a genuine desire to help the operative” and “to inspire each employee
with a desire to do his best and to furnish him with the means of doing it in a helpful environment” (5). It is difficult—if not impossible—to deny that many sources indicate a particular sentimentalism attributed to some mill administrators in regards to the workers they “cared” for within their mill villages. A quote from Peter Hollis, a YMCA welfare worker for Monaghan and a well celebrated educator in the Parker School system that served Monaghan in Greenville, articulates Parker’s public image: “Besides the profit motive, ‘Mr. Thomas Parker went into the mill business merely for the purpose of seeing what could be done to improve the welfare of the people … throughout his lifetime he made this his prime interest’” (Hollis qtd in Cottingham 1). We find a similar portrait in the autobiography of James Cannon, who helped to build North Carolina’s industry, and who was remembered as a “rugged individualist” who was honest and loyal (McLaurine 27).

The mythologies spun around mythic mill men not only publicly supported the industry by making an ideological space for the men of Southern Industry and its paternalism in American imaginations, it also overwrote and obscured the extraordinary profits mill owners accumulated from the surplus labor of workers who struggled to survive (McHugh, Campbell, “From Mountain Cabin” 11). But even within these stories there are truths; although Thomas Parker accumulated large profits, the adoration of the mill owner among some communities in Greenville, South Carolina is impossible to deny and repeated throughout the textile south.22 While we can call “false consciousness” on these claims of the Parkers’ generosity, and must be careful to continue to both

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22 For an excellent examples, see Weaver of Dreams: “A History of Parker District” by Mary Ariail and Nancy Smith as well as James William Cannon (1852-1921): His Plants, His People, His Philosophy by W. M. McLaurine.
complicate these writings of history and not to generalize them, we must also recognize
that there is both good and bad within these spaces: opportunity and exploitation.

Literacy sponsorship within model mill villages offers a rich social-scape to tease out this
spectrum, as campaigns were specifically initiated to increase mill efficiency at the same
time that they created educational opportunities for workers, though these opportunities
were limited during the early years of the industry. Thus, we gain greater access to the
complexities of the industry’s role in providing workers with resources that included
formal literacy instructions and to the ways that the profit motive of the capitalist is often
shrouded in ideological excess that rhetorically situate her or his motives in different
ways for different audiences. The drive for profit does not necessarily negate the good
work that the Parkers and others did, but does illustrate how access to formal literacy
instruction remains tied inextricably to larger economic movements and was historically
used to impact methods of production within the capitalist system.

**Behind the Curtain: Mill Administration, Welfare Work, and Consumer Identity in
the New South**

In this final section, I examine further conceptions of worker productivity
achieved through formal literacy learning as it impacted the domestic space and the
creation of consumer desire in mill families. As the previous section points out, workers
were seen as contributing to the economic recovery of the southern US as industrial
laborers; this contribution also took shape as mill villages introduced rural whites to
consumer culture emphasized through welfare work. Extensive scholarship has been done
connecting middle-class literacy practices with rising consumer culture during the early
twentieth century, emphasizing how the circulation of print texts—specifically mail order
catalogues and magazines—impacted the formation of hegemonic identity markers through consumption (Damon-Moore and Kaestle). Literacy events have also been connected to the creation of consumer markets that targeted women, forming spaces for “new” identities as capitalist ideologies embraced previously marginalized selves through commodity consumption (Hennessy, Profit). In other words, during the early twentieth century, middle class women were identified as “new” domestic consuming subjects and alphabetic and visual texts became a way to advertise products, evidenced in magazines and catalogues. Using this understanding of how alphabetic and visual texts circulated during this time period, I suggest that literacy campaigns targeting mill women not only created more efficient employees, but also increased the movement of economic capital by attempting to increase commodity consumption within these spaces.

Studies on working-class consumption and literacy prove challenging, as the purchase of texts was often less of a household expense, especially in southern mill communities (Nord, “Working-Class” 231), making data on texts more difficult to acquire. David Nord reads this finding as resistance to mainstream consumer culture, suggesting that families invested instead in building and supporting “traditional interpersonal communities,” upholding rural traditions (“Working-Class” 238-241). Without more specific information on how and what texts circulated within southern mill villages it is difficult to support or deny Nord’s claim, though it is likely that there is some truth to his speculations. In addition, Nord’s writing of working-class literacy practices speaks to Donehower’s findings that literacy learners respond to literacy campaigns in a variety of ways (if they choose to interact at all), including assimilating to the ideologies associated with sponsors, appropriating the literacy skills for alternative
purposes, and the rejection of campaigns (“Literacy Choices” 349-352). Oral histories suggest that texts circulated informally through village spaces though, passed from individual to individual instead of purchased by multiple households (Moore 153, Beurrier 1). Churches, libraries, and reading rooms also made text available in ways that may also have circumvented Nord’s data, as reports from the YWCA at Monaghan Mills claim that the branch library checked out 697 books in 1906, with 47 new books brought in, 17 purchased using library funds and 30 purchased by the mill owner, Thomas Parker (“Annual Statement of the YWCA of Monaghan Mills” 7). Additional books were “used” in the library, though were not formally borrowed. This intra-community circulation suggests that although household subscriptions to magazines and newspapers may have been low, literacy events were taking place within the mills and consumer culture was available to some families through textual consumption as well as the classes made available through welfare work programs.

Large gaps in available research still exist in terms of producing a fuller study of the reading, writing, and textual navigation of mill women. Thus, while we do not have immediate access to the specific texts advocated by mill administrators for their workers, we do know that the Parkers and others economically sponsored literacy campaigns within their villages during a time when new technology produced a boom in mass consumption of printed materials, the advertising industry, and mail order catalogues. These catalogues, including Sears and Roebuck and Larkin, increasingly targeted not only middle class but also rural white women, with products that made their lives easier through appliances and pre-made goods like soaps and clothing (Schlereth 365-367, 372-373). Some magazines circulating during this time, which oral histories place in mill
homes during the 1930’s, even placed an emphasis on the ways commodity consumption could bring comfort and ease to women and their families, as seen in the aptly named *Comfort Magazine* (Sayward 31, 34, Moore 158, see also Hatcher 36).

The idea of comfort and ease through commodity consumption coincided as well with campaigns across the US during the early twentieth century that encouraged residents of mill villages and other rural communities to change unhygienic behaviors through Best Yard competitions and Best Baby contests (“Notice: Prizes,” see also Lovett *Conceiving* 137). These contests will be taken up in terms of literacy learning on the mill hill in Chapter 4, but their function to encourage certain behaviors might be read as dialectical with the messages in mass-circulating texts to forward particular products and consumer practices. As welfare work emphasized shifts in household habits, it taught kinds of consumption advocated by these circulars including cooking using goods bought from the company store and sewing dresses that were considered “fashionable” (Hall, et al 264). Finally, as most mills owned their own company stores, encouraging consumption practices among workers not only further embedded them in the cycles of a cash economy (Eller 227), but likely brought additional profit—even if only marginal—to the mill compound.

The focus on women as household consumers and the keepers of the domestic space tied women to marriage and motherhood, expressing heteronormative and essentialist ideologies of the early twentieth century. Andrea Tone points out in her historical work that during the Progressive period, which she identifies as 1900-1920, industries concerned about the threat of increased federal and state legislation to protect workers instituted welfare work programs to assuage public outcry over living and
working conditions of laborers (4, 7). Welfare work programs directed at women were implemented because “according to employers, the workplace could be refashioned into an agent of female uplift and feminine reform, company cooking and nursing classes, sewing circles, and callisthenic breaks, welfare capitalists argued, would transform today's wage earner into tomorrow's better wife and mother,” and “upheld conventional gender roles” (Tone 11-12). Although many mill villages did provide “work” for men and boys, by working explicitly with women and girls companies accessed the space where the reproduction of labor power occurs. Thus, by changing consumption patterns in the home through increased literacy learning, families might be reached on a more systematic level. While Tone’s list of feminine reforms does not name literacy practices, we know them to be part of welfare work programs in mills like Monaghan and Parker, suggesting that their role in welfare work has often been marginalized.

As women were framed as central figures in the domestic space—and often targeted for products relating to this role—there is a connection between the upkeep of the home and the efficiency of workers. In an archived letter from 1909, written by Dr. Anna Brown from the YWCA, we access a conversation with a male welfare worker at Parker Mills, who “said he was trying to teach men how to live decently, but a work for women [was] needed even more than for men. Homes [were] wretched and as men are enlightened the homes become more disagreeable to them” (1-2). Brown goes on to comment: “removal to mill villages brings revelations of things unheard of whose uses are known. Money is not appreciated. The childish minds cry for the moon, so to speak, and they buy everything they fancy whether needed or not … The men get out to learn;
the women stay in and remain ignorant” (2). While the letter in many ways repeats the constructions of rural whites already teased out in this chapter, the conversation highlights the intersection of gender, literacy, and economy. Male workers needed a certain kind of household to return to after working in the mills and women lacked the social and cultural capital necessary to (re)create these spaces. While they participated in a cash economy (or used company script to purchase products, it is not clear which), their consumer desire was not cultivated and they bought commodities without consideration. Literacies, then, were needed both in terms of alphabetic texts and in terms of a more social nature, including the ability to read and write social space.

Historians identify how the “work” referenced in Brown’s letter and conducted by groups like the YWCA, functioned to “stimulat[e] desires for consumer goods that would compel mill hands to work regularly” (Hall et al 264). The complaint of the welfare worker to Brown indicates that these desires were also molded in particular ways; mill women who bought whatever items they pleased are framed as “childish” and “ignorant.” Thus, welfare workers encouraged women and their families to more fully participate in the consumer culture that was burgeoning around the urban middle class during the turn of the century, helping them to manage their consumption practices, which were tempered by their material and economic conditions. One telling example of the ways welfare workers navigated the space between encouraging certain types of displays of commodities and the low incomes of workers was through the creation of furniture using discarded items from the mills themselves, a practice cited in several archived sources at multiple mills (Wyche “At Proximity” 3-4, “Women’s Department” 4-5, Long 6-7). The

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23 It is somewhat unclear here whether women worked in Parker Mills during it’s early days, or if many women stayed at home, while men and children made up the working population.
“home-made” status of furniture and other items circumvents in many ways consumer culture, but in the next chapter I suggest that although it may not promote the circulation of economic capital, it does indicate a shift in social capital and the reading and writing of class habitus in mill homes.

Once again, the (re)construction of Appalachian women and communities enters the conversation here, as mill women were linked to stereotypes not only through the writings of mill owners, but also many welfare workers. Training materials produced for internal circulation by the Young Women’s Christian Association, for example, frequently exhibited a two-pronged approach of Appalachian as “self” and “other” when focusing on women living and working in villages in North and South Carolina. This encouraged “secretaries” sent to villages to both relate to the histories of rural white women and understand the ways in which they were socially (and economically) different.24 In “The Work of the YWCA in the Cotton Mill Villages of the South,” published in 1909 and archived in the YWCA files at Smith College, the organization prepares secretaries for their work with descriptions of laborers at Monaghan Mills in Greenville, SC as “ante-Revolutionary backwoodsm[e]n” whose “lives were harsh and narrow,” full of “superstition, suspicion, and stern religion” (2). The document goes on to claim:

just as the mountains hold back streams, so for generations they have held back a splendid people from the advantages of civilization. Gross ignorance has intensified suspicion, superstition, and strange ideas about religion. They have secret means for treating injury and disease. Many children are burned at grate

24 The Association used the term “secretary” to describe women who ran branches of the YWCA and conducted welfare work in company towns and urban settings.
fires and most mothers will at once send for one who has a gift of ‘taking out the fire.’ In case of a wound or severed artery, a person who knows how ‘to stop blood’ is called. (“The Work” 2)

These constructions echo earlier writing in reference to folk healing practices in the southern mountains (see Miles Ch 6), situated in opposition to contemporary medical and religious practices. The phrase “gross ignorance” ranks folk knowledge as less valuable than the formal, middle class schooling secretaries experienced before entering the villages, emphasizing the difference in social and economic class that separated them from workers. As secretaries were charged with helping these characters modernize and adapt to a social world framed as very different from rural Appalachian life, they used the tools of middle-class consumer culture to do so, layering their own ideological positioning on women who were both self and other.

Emphasis placed on “fixable” social ills and physical appearances in company towns shifted attention away from the exploitation experienced by both poor rural farmers, who often worked as tenants on land they did not own, and families in company towns. Framing workers and their families as rural white Appalachians proved a convenient way to do this for the industry, as accounts including those by Dawley mentioned above emphasized pathetic and affective appeals to readers in their portrayals of whites living in the southern mountains. Although economic capital was part of this conversation, emphasis in these accounts on “the unshaven and the unshorn and the unbathed” who entered mill villages seeking paid labor (Potwin 55) prioritized the tools of hygiene over fair labor practices. While some writers did in fact engage in social justice issues (child labor laws were a large social and political conversation during the
early twentieth century), the focus of the industry and many welfare workers during this time on social “issues,” while important, diverted attention to the physical appearance of mill workers and their homes. This move allowed mills to continue to reap profits off of surplus labor value as they simultaneously sponsored programs to better the lives of their workers through education in both alphabetic and social literacies.

Although welfare programs spoke to the rhetoric of social betterment through education, we must remember that the experience of upward economic mobility was rare during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the mills. Schools were often available with greater frequency in the mill village, but children often worked to contribute to their family’s survival, making their progress minimal (“The Mountain People” 26-28). In addition, Cathy McHughes suggests in her work on Alamance Mills in North Carolina that company-sponsored schools increased technical skills for working in the mills while “play[ing] a central role in developing noncognitive or affective skills” to encourage “the transmission of acceptable social values and patterns of behavior” for industrial workers (62-63), reinforcing the relationship between literacy sponsorship and increased productivity in methods of production. These statements do not deny the significance of literacy learning in the lives of individuals on the mill hill, but further suggest that the distributions of literacies was regulated, if nothing else by the material conditions that moved younger students into industrial labor and that limited the spare time of adult learners to pursue educational goals.

Pearl Wyche, a welfare worker for Cone Mills in North Carolina, reports:

Where welfare work is maintained, the operatives give a higher type of efficient service, they are progressive, appreciative, loyal, and the warmest terms of
sympathy exist between employer and employee. The mill-owner not only has more contented, more cheerful, more efficient operatives, but has the genuine love of his people. The officers and superintendents of mills, who have regular organized welfare work, express themselves as highly pleased with the results. (“Welfare Work” 1)

The ideological link between motivations for literacy sponsorship and increased methods of production are strongly articulated in Wyche’s writing, which is dated to the early to mid-1910’s. Within this passage, we see in some ways the completion of the cycle: workers at Proximity and White Oaks Mills where Wyche directed welfare work (both owned by Cone) are “efficient” in their work, “appreciative, [and] loyal.” In contrast to the unshorn mountain families in Potwin’s descriptions, Wyche describes “progressive” mill workers, which we may understand to include a variety of social and physical characteristics, including increased participation in consumer culture, that oppose the figure of the mountaineer teased out in other writings. Although Lydia Evans Beurrier recalls in her remembrances of mill village life: “many things were selected but never ordered from mail order catalogues in outhouses!” (1), her comments indicate not only the presence of consumer culture on the mill hill, but a desire from employees to participate, even as material conditions may have impacted their ability to.

**Conclusion**

The mill industry’s rhetorical use of the mythic mountaineer in its construction of mill workers positioned the industry as “divine”: “when the first [mill] whistle blew people flocked to the light from barren places” (Speake qtd in MacDonald 17). Upon entering the village the white mountaineer was ignorant but held promise; with a little
investment, the Anglo-Saxon blood could come to full fruition and create a loyal, reliable employee. Thus, as mills “produced” cotton thread and cloth, they also “produced” particular kinds of workers, using welfare work to construct efficient laborers from the “raw materials” entering from the Southern Mountain region and other rural areas in the South.

Teaching workers and their families literacies was a significant part of this production process. Mill administrators hoped education would help workers become more dependable, more competent, and reliant on a consumer capitalist culture, which was becoming increasingly text-based with the increasing circulation and consumption of mail order catalogues and magazines. Historicizing and contextualizing literacy campaigns and the motivations of literacy sponsors in this way emphasizes that literacies themselves are not “stable, discreet commodities” (Horner 6) but constantly constructed in the ways they are distributed to particular groups by particular groups. Literacy instruction and learning were complex activities within the mill village, bringing women “into a new world of simple living and high thinking … [to] teach them their relation to the nation’s growth” (Penfield 12). They were also accompanied by certain classed, gendered, and raced assumptions about how workers presented themselves and their homes.

Even as many of the transitions encouraged by welfare work impacted the way women were read in regards to social identity—for example, the “deficits” in hygiene and domestic constructions of the mountaineer that were cited as reasons for welfare work—early mill villages did not offer much economic mobility for workers, particularly for women. In this way, literacy campaigns perpetuated social violence as defined by Elspeth
Stuckey: as mills regulated the distribution of literacies, they reproduced social inequality based on class and gender, limiting opportunities even as they provided the possibility of increased resources (or at least “modern” resources) in mill villages (see Stuckey 93-95). We may also talk about this violence in terms of race, as literacy sponsorship in the mills was segregated in the same ways the working conditions were in the industry until the Civil Rights Era. The support of literacy courses within company towns drew on both the charitable impulse of white Progressive ideologies and the profit motive of mill owners and administrators, though historical work by Beatty, Tone, and Hall et al, along with my own archival work suggests that the charitable influences was often not the primary focus of welfare work. While we may argue the benefit of workers in accessing schooled literacies outweighed the social violence they encountered in the mill village, I assert we must recognize that these benefits are tied to the position of workers within industrial capitalism. Thus, economic and social progressions impacted the lives of workers in a variety of ways. In addition, it is difficult to locate mill administrators as either “good” or “bad” in the story of the New South; instead we must recognize that the renewal of Southern economy took place through the exploitation of wage-workers (in factories and on farms), made possible by a culmination of racist, classist, and regionalist ideologies.

In a letter archived in the YWCA files from O. May Jones in Greenville, SC, dated November 1912, we see a picture of the working mill women of the south:

The superintendent in one of the mills said to me recently: ‘I do not know of a more pathetically hopeless life in the world than the one of the mill girl. She comes in a child, and very soon reaches the highest position, and if she remains until she is an old woman, there is no difference either in work or wages.’
man it is different. He can go in and rise from a floor swe[e]per to Superintendent or Manager of the mill. The maximum wage is $2.00 a day and the minimum is 50 cts. The small girls who earn only 50 cts do very little save learn how to do the things that bring better wages. (1)

The comment from the superintendent reflects a more cynical nature than the writings of the Parkers, highlighting the difficult–if not impossible–nature of mobility for many women living and working in early southern mill villages. While literacy appears to be valued by operatives and employers in some mill spaces based on reports like Long’s on library usage, the ability to read and write appears to have been more of an investment in methods of production by economic sponsors than in the economic uplift of workers. On the other hand, social uplift, illustrated by modernized living conditions, increased hygiene, and resources including libraries seem to be in-line with the public face of benevolent mill programs, suggesting we have much to gain by breaking down capital into it’s different forms to separate economic, social, and cultural conditions. Finally, even as we break down forms of capital, we must remember that they remain intertwined, as the “charitable” work of mills increased their social capital within communities where they were thought to save rural whites from their backwards ways while also increasing economic capital through expanding sites of production and cultural capital as they gained additional knowledge about workers and what kinds of programs fit the needs of new recruits.

As child labor and mandatory schooling laws changed in the south and company sponsored welfare work began to decline after 1920, it is likely that the impact of formal literacy education changed greatly in the lives of learners. We see hints of this shift in the
rise of institutions like the Southern Summer School for Women Workers that offered more radical instruction for laborers (Frederickson) and changes in YWCA programming for industrial women (Fox 19). For this reason, it is significant to stress again that this project looks at a brief, though rich, chapter in the development of the industry. If we are to think critically about the distribution of literacies within different social spaces, the southern mill village in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers a glimpse at the motivations of a profitable industry that created living and working spaces for its employees, controlling to an extent the kinds of resources available to a population of people. Although we know and must recognize that these populations were not merely empty vessels when they entered the village—or as they lived and worked there—access to the writings of literacy sponsors allows us to better understand what these sponsors hoped to accomplish by financially supporting literacy campaigns to their workers. The examination of model mill villages where welfare work was implemented helps break down the immediate assumption that access to literacy sponsorship leads to increased economic and social opportunities, stressing instead the need for a more holistic look at larger social and economic motivations and goals for sponsorship as well as the structures that may impede (or encourage) mobility within a social context.
CHAPTER 4

“A LIFE OF THE HIGHEST AND YET THE LOWLIEST SERVICE”: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN MILL HILL LITERACY SPONSORSHIP

While the previous chapter considers the economic literacy sponsorship of mill administrators in the New South, this chapter considers the intentions and practices of welfare workers who actually taught literacy and other skills to mill laborers and their families. In framing welfare workers as literacy sponsors in early southern mill villages, I shift our focus from the ways literacy learning was conceptualized to impact methods of production and economic capital and connect literacy with the production and reproduction of social and cultural capital through class habitus and the organization of social space. While economic capital is most simply defined as money, social capital relates to group identity and affiliations. Cultural capital manifests as knowledge, education, and prestige, socially recognized through diplomas or in the exhibition of hegemonic ways of knowing. Clearly economic capital increases one’s access to higher social classes and therefore social capital, as it also increases the time and access one has to pursue education. For these reasons, all three forms of capital are interconnected. This chapter suggests welfare work in southern mill villages often attended to the production, circulation, and accumulation of social and cultural capital for residents even as they remained economically in the working class. By introducing the language of capital to literacy programs within these spaces, I link charitable work during industrialization and the logic of capitalist accumulation. Although women’s motivations for conducting welfare work were complex, they aligned with this logic, resulting in the circulation of capital, even as this capital did not take monetary form. Thus, while women’s roles as
literacy teachers broke through social boundaries around women’s access to paid labor, their positions were still tempered by prevailing hegemonic ideologies.

This turn to social and cultural capital echoes artifacts in Chapter 3 positioning the Southern cotton mills as the “saving grace” of rural whites, particularly regarding the “mountain problem” of white poverty in southern Appalachia. These documents created an ideological space for the industry by situating mill villages as production sites not only for economic capital, but also social and cultural capital as they introduced workers to modern American life. The canvas of the “mountaineer” as seen in the public imagination was one of ignorance but potential; welfare work strove to improve the lives of workers by cultivating this potential rooted in assumptions of Anglo-Saxon racial identity. Mill welfare work also occurred in conversation with other literacy and social campaigns during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that ranged in severity in their conceived work to educate women in Christian and middle-class habits (Goodburn, Donehower “Literacy Choices,” Cook-Gumperz, Graff). These educational programs usually targeted specific groups of women, including African American women affiliated with the Baptist Church (Higginbotham) or Orthodox Jewish immigrant women (Fritz) and taught women to present physical and social space that more closely mirrored hegemonic gender identities and lifestyles, crystallized in part by the print boom during these decades (see Damon-Moore and Kaestle). In this way, welfare work programs are one manifestation of
similar programs that tried to “normalize” populations, which often included working-class women and their families, through standardized language and social practices.25

On the mill hill, both administrators and welfare workers adopted the same rhetorical constructions of deficit in the character of the mountaineer/mill worker in public and private writings, highlighting household spaces and “domestic” matters including personal hygiene, childcare, and home and yard maintenance, where services were visibly needed. Mill owners emphasized changes in worker lifestyle alongside economic gains, prioritizing concern about the southern economy while nodding to social anxieties. Conversely, welfare workers acknowledged their programs contributed to increased productivity within the mills (and therefore increased profits for the industry), but primary and secondary sources suggest social and cultural motivations were the driving factors for women teaching classes in the villages. In this way, interesting distinctions become clear between these layers of sponsorship and gender. More traditionally public—and masculine—sponsors that financially supported these endeavors and owned the properties that made up the mill village appear to have held economic concerns as their primary motivation. Meanwhile, more “feminine” welfare workers (who were in fact both men and women) took on the goals of improving domestic and personal spaces within villages through their work with literacy learning.

The general focus on private lives in welfare work is the basis for the haunting claim of Hall, Korstad, and Leloudis that mill welfare work strove to promote individualism and consumer culture to deconstruct traditional kinship networks

25 For examinations of US literacy learning campaigns during the early twentieth century that forwarded English-only ideologies, see Young’s history of school systems in the Hawaiian territory and Amy Goodburn’s work on the Genoa Indian Schools.
experienced by many rural southern whites before they moved to the mill (264). I propose that literacy campaigns tied to welfare work during the industry’s boom between 1880 and 1920 contributed to this transformation, which complicates the ways they have historically been understood as charitable endeavors. As this chapter will show, literacy campaigns encouraged middle class ways of navigating the social world as literacy sponsors encouraged learners to employ literacy to recall recipes using cookbooks and modeled recording personal and organizational histories in scrapbooks. These textual events reflect how literacy was deeply connected to ways of life beyond the ability to produce or consume a text. In other words, studying the ways literacy campaigns were intertwined with the living conditions of female learners illustrates that while literacy learning no doubt opened doors, it re-enacted and reinforced valued social practices and perceptions based on race, class, and gender.26

It is significant to remember that welfare programs are difficult to generalize, as they varied from mill to mill based on the investment of mill owners, the tactics and engagement of welfare workers, and the receptivity of the individual communities the programs served. The papers of welfare workers in larger, model mills do show some consistency in regards to the sponsorship of welfare work and literacy classes, repeatedly emphasizing the labor of socializing mill women and their families to town life after the isolation of the mountain and rural regions. Although it is not possible to make blanket statements, the repetition of certain themes allows me to create one possible portrait of the goals of welfare work and common methods through which these goals were

26 It is significant as well to note here that at this time research indicates that the village space was heteronormative as well.
approached. Although welfare work sponsored literacy learning for all ages and genders, I focus on adult literacy learning for women on the mill hill, highlighting the ways literacy and hegemonic gendered and raced identities were linked to literacy distribution. Thus, this chapter does not strive to tally the numbers of literate women within these spaces or gauge the effectiveness of the campaigns presented; instead, I emphasize how literacy learning was thought to achieve social and cultural changes in the lives of Appalachian mill women. It is only through understanding how literacy is constructed that we can understand literacy’s relationship to capital and thus social change and oppression.

The documents produced by literacy sponsors in the southern mills explicitly lay out these relationships in ways that may be more difficult to access from literacy learners, tying together gender, race, and literacy learning with habitus and capital. Thus, I draw on the theories of Bourdieu to explain the focus of welfare work on “fixable” deficits in physical space and behavior, as these manifestations of class were hoped to position mill women in a higher social space. These intended shifts are illustrated in a variety of literacy events, including fliers circulated in mill villages, a cookery text book produced for mill cooking classes, and a Scrapbook produced at Monaghan Mills, all representing the modern lifestyles forwarded by reformers. Studying the literacy sponsorship of women by women paints a complex portrait of progressive ideals and normalizing ideologies. After examining documents produced by welfare workers in North and South Carolina, it becomes clear that while these organizations and individuals were
progressive in regards to gender, they simultaneously worked within hegemonic social expectations that aimed to transition women from rural and working-class lives to versions of middle-class, white, and urban ways of living and knowing.

**Transforming Place, Transforming Space: Welfare Work, Habitus, and Literacy**

**Events**

The concept of “welfare work” itself was not unique to the mill village and in fact reflected larger social concern about the living and working conditions of factory workers during the period of Industrialization in the US. In the previous chapter, I referenced Andrea Tone’s claim that owners of industry invested in benevolent work to keep the government from imposing legislation targeting their companies. While this offers a possible reason for corporate investment, Lori Ginzberg provides additional context around women who conducted benevolent work, specifically in relation to gender, race, and class. Ginzberg aligns wealthy, white, educated women’s charitable work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with “the ideology of benevolence, and … its insistence on specific standards of sexual, work, religious, and leisure behavior, [which] underpinned the cultural authority of a multilayered middle class over the poor, the non-Protestant, and the fallen” (8). Ginzberg concludes:

The success of charitable and benevolent endeavors depended upon this belief in women’s invisibility and lack of self-interest. Charity, [and] welfare in the 20th century, was a necessary component of economic growth; it mediated the most

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27 By the early twentieth century when the YWCA began it’s first outreach work in the southern mills, the organization had already been established in northern industrial spaces, including New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia, and had even established branches for African American and Native American women (“History”). They also sent female missionaries around the world to locations including India and China.
blatant harshness and dislocation of nineteenth-century capitalism and urbanization. Charitable enterprises provided some cushion for the poor in the form of material goods, temporary shelter, small subsidies, and the care of children even as the benevolent urged the poor to conform to the tenets that would ostensibly raise them from their current condition. (216)

This analysis aligns with Tone’s explanation of industrial welfare work in the early twentieth century in that it became the role of women to fill the gaps left by industrial labor to ensure that workers’ material and affective needs were addressed. The glory sought by welfare workers and other women performing benevolent labor was not the glory of monetary riches; their gain was measured by working women’s ability to reflect middle-class and Protestant expectations including improved living and hygienic conditions, increased literacy practices, and frequently, religious conversions. The work to produce these changes resulted in the production and accumulation of social and cultural capital that aligned company towns with ways of living more closely mirroring middle and upper class benevolent workers; mill women were taught skills (cultural capital) that repositioned them away from rural ways of living to “town” life (social capital). While material conditions typically regulated women’s access to literacy learning and mobility with respect to economic capital, welfare workers strove to produce social and cultural capital within the mill village to alter social space and reflect a higher social class.

28 More specifically, the presence of Protestant ideologies in such social movements has been related to the Second Great Awakening, which resulted in large number of religious converts in the growing United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Boylan 64).
Within mill villages during the southern industry’s boom (1880-1920), welfare workers, both men and women, typically lived on-site in cottages “donated” by the mill. In this way, welfare workers were better able to integrate into the daily lives of mill workers because they experienced (in theory) similar living conditions to those of the families they served. Additionally, as benevolent workers went about their daily lives, they provided intentional examples of appropriate behavior in the ways they dressed and how they organized their homes. Training documents from the YWCA’s work in southern mill villages, which began in 1904 at Monaghan Mills in Greenville, SC, advise welfare workers (called “Secretaries” to indicate their positions as leaders of local mill branches of the organization) to study the village and identify its needs as well as collect feedback from mill women and make adjustments to programs as necessary (“Suggestions” 7, 3). While institutional records for the YWCA do not contain writings from the Secretaries outlining individual changes made to the organization’s structures, notes from the Annual Industrial Department meeting in 1919 state:

the secretaries who attended this Council … brought home the realization that they had not been giving these women as much voice as they should have in planning the club programs. Too often the secretary was offering industrial women classes in china painting or embroidery or dressmaking because ‘the Association had always had classes in these subjects,’ instead of finding out what the girls really wanted. (Fox 19)

Although these comments indicate shifts in the Association’s approach to worker education in the last years of this study (addressed in the next Chapter), they also indicate the ways in which classes were initially determined less by the actual needs and interests
of mill women than by the push to encourage hegemonic identity markers and habitus (including fashionable clothing and china).

While the combination of classes alluded to in this passage do not immediately suggest the alphabetic literacies that make up the main focus of this project, they provide insight into the skills surrounding reading and writing within these campaigns and thus emphasize the interconnected nature of literacy learning and particular behaviors and social expectations. They also suggest that literacies might be seen as both alphabetic and social: women might read and write text as well as designs for china or dress patterns.

While we do not have access to possible literacy events, including instructional materials or additional written reflections on these welfare classes, the reference allows us to better illustrate the context around literacy learning and its emphasis on presentations of physical space. In addition, it indicates that the classes “the girls really wanted” had less to do with the creation of middle class domestic spaces and gendered activities, particularly by the later years of this study.

The use of literacy campaigns to forward a social agenda is well documented in scholarship around educational programs that moved into the Appalachian region during the nineteenth century. Kim Donehower identifies multiple literacy sponsors in the North Carolina mountain community of Haines Gap, including religious groups, government sponsors, and social workers, all of which prioritized literacy learning in their reform work in the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (“Literacy Choices”). Additional study of reading primers produced in the early twentieth century also highlight this connection, including the Country Life Readers series, written by Cora Wilson Stewart for use in the Kentucky Moonlight Schools to combat adult illiteracy in
the state’s mountain counties. The larger Country Life Movement was attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, whose Country Life Commission was started in 1908 to encourage rural people and talents to remain in rural areas through initiatives to improve life there (Lovett *Conceiving* 110, 114-115). Thus, primers like Stewart’s used literacy learning as a way to address rural life on its own terms, though they did so through the promotion of class habitus and the attribution of value to specific presentations of place.

As Wendy Sharer points out, the ideological positioning of literacy learners is made transparent in Stewart’s texts because time gives us, as researchers, perspective; the *Country Life Readers* advocated progressive political action to combat the exploitation of Appalachian land and people simultaneously as it promoted shifts in habitus (Sharer). While Sharer’s analysis emphasizes this potential for more radical ideologies in the text’s encouragement of (male) students to be active in politics through voting, she also indicates entries that simultaneously forward hegemonic conceptions of neatness and orderly spaces. Perhaps one of the best examples is from Stewart’s first edition of the *Country Life Reader*, published in 1915. In a well-cited passage, the book tells its rural audience:

This is a nice house.

It is neat and clean.

The yard is clean and has flowers in it.

People that go down this road say:

‘A nice, neat family lives in this house.

We know the family from the house that it lives in.’ (Stewart 24)
These statements are accompanied by a drawn picture of a well-dressed man leaning on a fence beside a horse and young child; behind the fence is a simple house with a woman and man on the porch. There is a windmill in the background and the full foliage around the house is trimmed. Each of the characters appear at ease and the passage indicates that the family living in the home have social capital—are part of the “we”—based on the physical appearance of their home.

On the other hand, the page that follows reads:

‘This place is dirty and ugly.
The house needs paint.
The yard is full of weeds.
A lazy, shiftless family lives here.’
‘Yes, but how do you know that?’
‘I know it from the house.
Lazy, shiftless people live in dirty, ugly homes.’ (Stewart 25)

This block of text is accompanied by a drawn picture featuring a man and woman who are well dressed on horseback in front of a dilapidated home with bare trees and a fallen stone fence. Clouds appear to roll in from behind the house to suggest an oncoming storm and the people on horseback appear to have no intention of stopping to visit. Once again, when asked how the speaker, who in the picture appears to be the male in the riding party, knows why the family is lazy and shiftless, the outward, physical appearance of place is referenced as locating the household in social space. The need for paint on the home indicates larger social deviance; place translates into space and a dearth of capital.
While the second page of text exemplifies stereotypes of Appalachian deficit, the first shows the region’s potential.

Stewart’s language mirrors YWCA language in training materials, which explicitly reference both mountaineers and mill women as shiftless (“Educational Training School” 3 and “The Work of the YWCA” 2). This positioning indicates clearly and directly the need for work to teach women “civilized” habits as well as the role of literacy campaigns to advance this kind of learning. Further, archived materials like the recorded memories of Lydia Evans Beurrier bolster the correlation between messy homes and low social class in the experience of mill women. Beurrier, who grew up in a mill village around Durham, North Carolina, recalls her childhood there, sharing: “a remark I heard when I was quite young could have caused trouble, had it been repeated. Someone said a certain family was ‘sorry’, a commonly misused word. I asked what they were sorry for, thinking they were hellbound. I later realized they were slovenly” (3). While we cannot directly trace Beurrier’s language to a specific text like Stewart’s, the link between a “sorry” family being either hellbound or slovenly in the mind of a young girl indicates the value of tidiness and the negative implications of failing to meet social norms in a mill village during the early twentieth century.

Bourdieu introduces social space as defined by conceptual differences between socio-economic groups, which tie together material circumstances and “expressions” of class and position people within social hierarchies (“Social Space” 16). In this way, material expressions like the way we arrange physical places (homes, offices, gardens), the clothing we choose to wear, or the watch we proudly display can be intentional displays of class that are in turn “read” by others to socially and economically situate a
group or individual. This concept is made very clear in Stewart’s text, both alphabetically and visually, as words like “neat,” “clean,” and the presence of flowers are associated with groups and individuals who are “nice” and a part of the community. Words like “dirty” and “ugly” alongside references of chipped paint and weeds signify groups and individuals who are “lazy,” “shifty,” and not a part of the community (to use Beurrier’s term, they are “sorry”). Group membership and community acceptance (“We know the family that lives in this house”) are further emphasized in visuals that depict the speakers in communion with the nice family and quickly riding past the home of the shifty; having social and cultural capital as illustrated through one’s presentation of home is rewarded by a valued spot in social space. The actual instructions of the text itself indicate the way cultural capital (knowledge of what a house should look like, for example) and social capital (the ability to join the community by putting this knowledge to work) spread through the Moonlight School’s literacy campaign via alphabetic reading and writing. As adult learners took on literacies, they were encouraged to read, write, and display certain signifiers that made them a part of a new discourse community.

While the connection between literacy and consumer culture in mill villages is taken up further in the next chapter, Damon-Moore and Kaestle suggest that during the print boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increased magazine and catalog circulation in the US furthered solidified and nationalized hegemonic gender and class identities. Thus, this time period marks a kairos of technology and access that crystallized aspects of mainstream gender, class, and racial identities, spread through literacy campaigns as well as consumption of magazines, catalogues, and other reading materials. Although commercial texts increased women’s access to new commodities, the
female identity signified by consumer behavior and advertising continued to uphold
traditional gender norms relegating women to the domestic sphere, particularly for
targeted middle class audiences. Capitalist markets absorbed the potential site of radical
transformation in identity brought on by the explosion of text as women’s consumer
desire was molded by the benefits of the division of labor in industrial capitalist
economies. Specifically, women’s unpaid household labor was valued as it reproduced
labor power in the domestic sphere (Hennessy Profit 105). Additionally, as pointed out in
Chapter 3, as texts like the Larkin Catalogue, Comfort Magazine, and Sears and Roebuck
began to spread to more rural areas, they targeted new markets for household gadgets and
fashionable clothing in rural women. Mail order catalogues and magazines helped spread
nationalized standards of habitus through advertisements of products and short stories
that encouraged their consumption. These standards further represented changes in social
and cultural capital in the growing middle class; to belong, one must embrace the
improvements progress brought.29

To further tease out specific examples of literacy events within some mill villages
that lay out the changes in habitus encouraged by welfare work, I turn to the archived
papers of Cone and Cannon Mills and The Southern Textile Bulletin. Here, texts
distributed by different mills indicate the actions required to create social and cultural
capital amongst women and their families. In one such event, Cone Mills distributed
fliers to ban dogs and fowls from “run[ning] at large on our property” at Proximity,

29 It is also significant to remember, as we will see later in this chapter, that this time
period was also one of significant increases in immigration to the United States. In this
way, nationalization and socialization of women—especially in the working class—was a
significant target of benevolent work in both rural areas and urban communities.
Revolution, and White Oaks Cotton Mills starting January 1, 1912 (“Notice”). While animals running loose in a front yard may have been functional (or at least “normal”) in rural settings, in town spaces these functions were lost. Instead, Pearl Wyche, the head of welfare work in Proximity and White Oaks Mills (part of the larger Cone Mills organization), expresses irritation that many families did not follow the ban in her annual report for 1913, noting that large numbers of dogs continued to roam the property (“Proximity and White Oaks Welfare Work Report 1913” 3). She goes further to say that families failing to comply with mill regulations should be banned from both Proximity and White Oaks properties, indicating that some households that were asked to leave one mill took up residence at the other (2-3). Families accumulated social capital by exhibiting certain kinds of behaviors related to particular ways of knowing; failure to embrace these behaviors resulted in a loss of social capital and potential social stigmas within the social space.

*The Southern Textile Bulletin*, whose primary audience was mill administration, further illustrates the class habitus created by welfare work through short notices submitted by mills across the region announcing contests to award the best yards and most handsome babies, and community trash clean-ups aimed at encouraging workers to organize space (and themselves) according to a middle class logic (“Announcement of Pickens Mill” 6, “Anderson Mill Village” 13, see also “Proximity and White Oaks Welfare Work Report 1913” 1 and “Notice!”). These programs rewarded families and individuals for normalizing their behaviors through the use of friendly competition as a motivating factor that aligned with the logic of accumulation fueling capitalist economies. Further, the logic of individual competitions discouraged both rural kinship
networks and relationships that might foster labor organizing. Contests therefore, alongside village-wide fairs, provided venues for women to show off the skills they learned in the classes provided by welfare workers and they were also “use[d] … as a means of social control” to encourage rural residents to make positive changes in their lives (Lovett *Conceiving* 137). As women were taught to sew fashionable clothing by welfare workers they could produce outfits for their babies entered in the “Better Babies” contest or create displays for annual fairs, which were largely anticipated community events (“Proximity and White Oaks Welfare Work Report 1913” 1-2). These fairs and competitions illustrated the new habitus produced by welfare work and modified by mill women, representing a social as well as alphabetic literacy learning.

While welfare workers often noted it took considerable work on their part to encourage women to participate in programs like these, reformers regularly visited the homes of women in the mill village to encourage their attendance and it appears that many programs were at least nominally successful (“Proximity and White Oaks Welfare Work Report 1913” 1-2, Long 11-12, see also “Letter from T. S. Vance”). Hegemonic gender roles were also reflected in the prizes for a trash collection competition in 1915 amongst children at Anderson Mill in South Carolina, which included monetary prizes in addition to dolls for girls and baseballs for boys (“Anderson Mill Village” 13). This work

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30 Better Babies contexts were also associated with popular movements in the study of eugenics during this period, reflecting larger social concerns around the state of families amongst increased immigration, urbanization, and decreasing family sizes attributed to women’s increased education, especially for white women (Lovett *Conceiving* 82, 90, and 146). These larger conversations cast a darker shadow over mill events, even as eugenics is not directly referenced in archival materials. The emphasis teased out that constructs workers as Anglo-Saxon mountaineers echoes some of these anxieties, though more research is necessary to further explore the connection in this context.
held at its center the re-aligning of community around mill-sponsored activities. Thus, in these writings of mill village life, the layers of sponsors involved in benevolent work—the mills themselves and welfare workers—are at the core of community life. As welfare workers pushed to create a sense of habitus within mill villages, they did so within a space of tension between mill women’s rich lives in rural communities and the lives reformers envisioned for them.

Mill administration and welfare workers claimed that cleanup work was necessary in part because workers who saw their houses as homes (according to a middle class habitus) were less likely to move or resist harsh working conditions making them more efficient, dependable, and profitable for the company (Long 12). Of course some lifestyle and hygienic practices associated with the “mountaineer” and other rural white stereotypes related to the material conditions of rural communities. Historical recovery work in Appalachian Studies paints a portrait of the region as diverse and “connected through economic transactions, political ties, and kinship affiliations” to the rest of the US during the nineteenth century (Anglin “Lives” 187), but differences between life in rural communities and villages were real. For this reason, movements to encourage alternative practices within villages certainly had positive impacts, for instance reducing diseases like typhoid and pellagra on some mill hills (especially when accompanied by structural changes including indoor plumbing). Improvements were communicated through literacy events that established the hierarchal social ranking of habitus reinforced in the ways cited above, setting a clear precedent for acceptable and unacceptable uses of physical place.
Through one last example, we see the function of mill-sponsored literacy as defining the parameters for place and space in addition to reinforcing these regulations amongst village residents. A memo from Proximity Mills provides very explicit instructions outlining the prevention of illness in the village by advising residents to: clean chicken houses and stables “at least once each week,” kill flies with company purchased and freely distributed fly swatters, screen in their homes with company purchased screens (sold at cost and installed for free), eliminate mosquitoes by removing “old cans, pots, tubs, or barrels around to collect stagnant water,” let fresh air in by opening windows, and “keep your premises clean” (“Notice: Prizes”). This list of actions accompanies the announcement of a contest to determine the best kept yard in the village, including prizes of $5 for first place, $3 for second, $2 for third, and two prizes of $1 each for fourth place. The contest awards those whose yards are consistently found in good shape, “not to those who wait until the last week to clean up and make a good showing” (“Notice: Prizes”).

In similar ways to Stewart’s reading primers, these notices connect the act of reading and literacy with learning about social space, as neat yards indicate group membership and social prestige. While Stewart’s *Country Life Readers* illustrated and reinforced group membership or social shunning in relation to images of cleanliness, mill village fliers like this one used competition to encourage workers to create social capital through the labor involved in clearing their yards; those who did not comply were “sorry.” Further, as suggested by Wyche’s comments above, families who were not able

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31 The emphasis on fly swatters and screens for windows is also seen in public health campaigns headed by Samuel Crumbine in Kansas, including the well-known “Swat the Fly” crusade of the early twentieth century (Kansas Historical Society).
to make the transition to village life were told to leave, as we see in a diary entry from a supervisor at Cannon Mills, John C. Mason, on January 27, 1908. Mason writes: a family reported to the mill for keeping hogs in their home is told “to remove them or move” (8). The fact that hogs were being kept in a mill house in the first place suggests workers used spaces as they saw fit (or had especially unruly hogs), resisting some expectations of village life expressed by welfare workers and administrators, though the mills certainly attempted to maintain order and control.

**Fat Back to Cream of Wheat: Literacy, Cook Books, and Class in Southern Cotton Mill Villages**

Evidence of explicitly gendered literacy events further exhibits how welfare work programs targeted women to teach habitus. Perhaps the best example of this is *The Cookery Text Book* by Clara Graves, who served as the director of Domestic Science for the Monaghan Mills YWCA organization. The book was published in Greenville, SC in 1910 and archived in the Association’s papers; while circulation materials are not available, the book’s preface positions it as an instructional manual for classes in the mill village. Cooking classes are frequently referenced in regards to welfare work, pictorially in materials produced by the YWCA, in testimonials from mill owners on the “good work” of the organization in working with women, and in secondary sources (YWCA Scrapbook, *The Opinion* 9, see also Hall et al). As these courses targeted women, I suggest they drew in part from the conception of domestic space as lacking social and cultural capital, as mill homes failed to meet the standards held by reformers. The culinary habits of rural communities marked families in terms of deficit. As “mill men realize the great importance attached to well-cooked foods,” according to the YWCA,
kitchens proved a site for mill-sponsored literacies to take hold, teaching women to both “read” and “write” recipes and reconceptualize the foods they served (Long 5-6). Cookery classes on the mill hill were thus a significant part of creating a new habitus within company towns, pushing women to use store-bought and processed foods using recipes provided by welfare workers. They further suggest food exhibited both cultural capital (knowledge of what foods to eat, why one might eat such foods, and how to safely and correctly prepare foods) and social capital (group membership through shared “habits of diet”).

While *The Cookery Text Book* was created for use “in the Domestic Science classes of the Public Schools in mill villages and rural communities,” the preface states: “a large number of recipes has been added that are not used in the suggested three years’ course, thereby making it adaptable for use in any Domestic Science Class or for home use” (Graves n.p.). It was therefore a collection intended for all ages of women on the mill hill with the possibility of reaching audiences at both beginner and more advanced levels of knowledge. In addition, four cookbooks are named as sources for the recipes in the text, including the *Boston Cooking School Cook Book*, *Home Science Cook Book*, *Hostess of To-day*, and the *Detroit Public School Cook Book* (Graves n.p.). Thus, the recipes collected and distributed in the book did not represent a particular local flavor or food habits of the intended readership. Instead, they were gathered by Graves from a variety of other cookery textbooks, primarily connected to large northern cities that housed industrial workers.  

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32 Linda Hull Larned, the author of *The Hostess of To-day* (1910), is attributed with founding a cookery school in the early twentieth century in Syracuse, New York.
amongst similar publications places it within larger conversations about cooking science and the significance of using the cookbook genre as an educational tool that utilized literacy—and likely acted as a literacy primer like Stewart’s—to convey particular kinds of knowledge to women and girls. In producing and circulating an instructional cookery manual, Graves and her colleagues highlighted kitchens on the mill hill as a site for assimilation and regulation as rural families were told to transition from cooking fat back to Cream of Wheat.

Writing about communities in Southern Appalachia during the early twentieth century, John Campbell highlights the significance of “habit[s] of diet” in the lives of the women and families who moved to cotton mills during this time period. Campbell recognizes that while more diverse over the summer, the main foods prepared by rural communities generally included “corn meal, wheat flour, fat and pork” in addition to vegetables grown on farms and in gardens (“The Mountain People” 19). Ben Lemert, in his study on Piedmont mills, echoes these images, describing the southern mountaineer as “reared on fat back, corn bread, and molasses” (8). Habits proved difficult to break as families moved to cotton mills, as Campbell reports families preferred to eat in ways they were used to as opposed to experimenting with foods economically or culturally made available in the mill village. For this reason, he claims:

> The food more suited to them in the out-door life of the mountain is unsuited to them in the indoor life of the mills and, when it palls, they do not seek the nourishing foods such as red meats—to which they have been unaccustomed

(“Antique Cookbook Victorian Cookery”). Mary J. Lincoln, out of Boston, wrote the Home Science Cookbook.
since the disappearance of game—but seek to stimulate appetite by cheap canned goods to which they were somewhat accustomed in the mountains, but which they could not always afford to buy. (“The Mountain People” 24)

Thus the impressions of Appalachian food habits, which were likely a combination of actual and stereotyped experiences, enforced a perceived deficit of “nourishing foods” that positioned the mountaineer in need of outside influence (Dawley *The Child* 65-66).

Campbell further points out the utility of cookery classes in many villages, stating food in mill homes was often either prepared by a grandmother and reflected rural food habits or by girls too young to work in the mills, who may not be knowledgeable in cooking:

> There is little time for training in domestic science, and the testimony of welfare workers bears out the experience of teachers that it is a difficult matter to bring those who need it most to see that training in domestic science is worthy of consideration… We are dealing here, as in all phases of their life, with a people acting under their likes and prejudices, and we are confronted with the ever present problem of teaching people to choose for themselves what is best. (“The Mountain People” 25)

These statements reflect an early moment in the understanding of nutrition (and malnutrition) as a public health issue. In particular, during the first decades of the twentieth century, concerns with “habits of diet” and kitchen practices of Appalachian and mill families illustrate a shift that occurred between 1880 and 1920 in how many reformers addressed health issues in the nation, from larger scale concerns often associated with industrialization and its impact on the body to “efforts to isolate disease-
carrying individuals’” and the development of germ theory (Lovett “The Popeye Principle” 804-806, 814). While this transformation is apparent throughout many aspects of welfare work that encouraged women to “disinfect [their] environment” by killing flies and sweeping their yards (Lovett “The Popeye Principle” 814, “Notice: Prizes”), it is also reflected in the teaching of cookery science by Graves and others. Thus, literacy events around the Text Book built cultural capital amongst mill women that was praised by Captain Smyth of Pelzer Mill in South Carolina in his testimony of the ‘good work’ the YWCA women did in his mill village. Smyth claimed: “it is most important that our people be taught how to cook and how to prepare food, and to wisely buy meats and serve them in an appetizing manner,” reflecting the value of accumulating social and cultural capital as well as economic (The Opinion 9). Texts like Graves’ Cookery Text Book were highly valued as helping white workers adjust to their new lives in industry towns, laying out a particular kind of content as well as form for conveying ways of navigating the social world.

A closer look at the contents of Graves’ text book reveals the kinds of knowledge mill were expected to value in their kitchens. This is significant as learning to read and otherwise use the cook book was a step in the layered process of mill literacy sponsorship. Following the Cookery Text Book’s Preface, readers are presented with a “Table of Abbreviations,” measurements and weights conversion charts, reasons for cooking food, and a list of “principal methods of cooking” that defines the differences between broiling, baking, boiling, stewing, steaming, frying, sautéing, and pan-broiling (Graves 2-3). This two-page spread of gathered facts also includes a list of different “classes” of foods, how they are used in the body, and examples of foods in each class.
Some categories are: proteids (“meats, eggs, milk”), carbohydrates (“sugar, starch”), fats (“butter, oils, cream”), and minerals (“salt, fruit salts, vegetable salts”) (3). These “basic” definitions indicate the influence of food science during the early twentieth century as well as lay out the kinds of information believed valuable for women as they prepared meals for their families. Alphabetic literacies were a pipeline for cultural and social capital; women and girls using the cookbook were taught to think and speak in the language of teaspoons and cups, proteids and vegetable salts.

Although recipes are assigned to different years of study, their appearance in the book is organized according to different types of dishes, including beverages, egg dishes, vegetables, meats, invalid cooking, and jelly and canned fruit. Thus, students and more advanced cooks were encouraged to browse instructions, making choices amongst multiple options for beverages or salads. This specific method for navigating text mirrors the processes of searching through a mail order catalog, as readers are presented with prescribed variety, ordered by particular ways of seeing foods. The first three years of Monaghan’s “Course of Study” referenced in the book’s preface provide an alternative organization of recipes, referencing additional lessons not included in the book that focus more broadly on what we might consider life skills. Each year addresses more complex matters of cookery science, beginning with the “study of measurements,” “blackening the stove,” and “laying and lighting a fire” in the first year. A list of recipes follows that include baked apples, cream toast, and peanut brittle (7). Year two includes a study of the food classifications mentioned above and a review of table settings amongst cornmeal

33 The complete list of categories is: beverages, cereals, egg dishes, vegetables, soups, meats, batters and doughs, salads and sandwiches, cakes and cookies, des[s]erts, fruits, cheese dishes, candy, frozen desserts, invalid cookery, and jelly and canned fruit.
porridge, cup cakes, and prune whip (8); year three teaches students about “processes of
digestion, absorption, and assimilation,” “preparing a picnic lunch,” “planning meals,”
and “dividing an income” (9). Recipes for the final year of instruction are given for
Cream of Wheat, creamed salmon, and fruit ice cream (9). Finally, while the lesson plans
for blacking the stove and dividing a household’s income are not included in the book,
their presence in the Course of Study lists that precede the actual recipes reminds readers
that the knowledge transmitted in cookery classes reaches beyond the ability to read
recipes and make certain dishes. Presentations of certain table settings or activities like
picnic lunches suggest a much fuller rewriting of social space and habitus that included,
but was not limited to, the foods in one’s pantry; completion of welfare work courses
implied exposure to a process of normalization, whether students actually adopted new
manners or not.

Graves’ text provides a tangible example of how welfare work rewrote social
space in the mill village, framing food as indicative of classed positions in social space.
The science of “cookery” is defined simply as cooking with particular attention to:
attractive appearance, good flavor, digestibility, and sanitation of foods (Graves 2). The
ability to successfully achieve these goals illustrates an accumulation of cultural and
social capital, indicating a cook understands socially acknowledged culinary skills
outlined above and that she is capable of providing for her family. Additionally, the
emphasis on store-bought and processed foods that may have been harder to acquire in
rural areas including lemons (Lemonade, Sponge Cake, and Lemon Pie 12, 39, and 43),
cans of condensed milk (Condensed Milk Ice Cream 53), Cream of Wheat (14), and
Baker’s chocolate (Hot Chocolate and Chocolate Frosting 12, 40) encouraged families to
take advantage of company stores located within mill villages. Similar items, including additional ingredients like sugar, coffee, lard, and syrup are recorded as purchased at the York Cotton Mills Store, later part of Cannon Mills, in January of 1903 by mill families (“York Cotton” 62, 65). Archived store ledgers suggest that village merchants supplemented the diets of workers, who frequently had gardens and livestock around their cottages. Through its promotion of foods that were sold at the company store, *The Cookery Text Book* also promoted participation in the village community through consumer behavior and shared places and experiences.

While it is possible—and perhaps even likely by the early twentieth century—that many rural communities had access to processed foods in local stores, the emphasis on cookery classes in welfare work programs suggests transitions in diet made up a large part of the social and cultural work performed by women in the YWCA and other organizations. The use of food to reflect identity is also found in scholarship on other reforms targeting women’s culinary practices during this time, suggesting the likelihood that deliberate alterations in habitus were the foundation for this literacy event. For example, in her study of Lizzie Black Kander’s “culinary reform” work in Milwaukee during the first decades of the twentieth century, Angela Fritz offers similar findings about teaching immigrant Jewish women to cook using “American” foods like baking powder biscuits—also found in Graves’ text—and brands like Knox’s Gelatin. Fritz identifies Kander’s work as an “[attempt] to change Jewish diet by making it more scientific, American, and elegant” (46-47). Kander used similar methods to YWCA welfare work in campaigns targeting urban Jewish women, using her own published cookbook, *The Settlement Cook Book: The Way to a Man’s Heart* (published 1901) to raise
money for social efforts. Fritz also identifies the text’s emphasis on “neatness, order, and exactitude,” teaching immigrant women to follow recipes written in English during cookery courses (Fritz 45). The subtitle to Kander’s book not only locates cooking within the female domestic space, but also echoes the heteronormativity of the early twentieth century and the orthodox Jewish context of her readers. As Fritz points out, the book and the classes in which it was used reflected a fairly conservative approach to women’s role in society that countered the more overtly political Suffragettes. Kander instead believed “women’s maternal and moral skills could remedy the problems arising from immigration, inadequate public services, and incompetent political leadership” (38-39). In this way, women had power to create social change, though this change was rooted in traditional values that required assimilation of cultural differences and restrictive gender roles and sexuality.

Fritz’s historical recovery of Kander’s cook book and the effort of her benevolent work to change the habits of diet of urban immigrant women sheds light on the ways Graves’ cook book (and the lessons accompanying it) may have similarly impacted the diets—and habitus—of mill women. It is more difficult to reconstruct Appalachian diets than those dictated by Orthodox Judaism, but documents like Campbell’s do construct the food habits of the mountaineer in strokes of deficit. In similar ways that the physical appearance of homes were a repeated focus of welfare work in model mill villages, cooking classes are almost universally referenced as part of these efforts at socialization (Hall et al); Graves’ Cookery Text Book connects this socialization with the production and consumption of text and literacy events. The cook book also provides an example of the diversity of texts that served as reading primers within mill communities, how the
domestic space was gendered as feminine, and the way such primers forwarded consumer behaviors in the foods and cooking practices that it exemplified.

“To fit the Girl for the Noble Sphere”

In this final section, I present a scrapbook of photographs taken at the Monaghan Mill Village between 1900 and 1906. This literacy event helps us consider the ways visual images and “object lessons” constructed by literacy sponsors brings together the analysis of the previous two sections as literacy sponsors rewrote presentations of place to impact social space. This use of multiple modes expands how we conceptualize literacy to include visual and more tactile methods for “reading” and “writing” text to include the Scrapbook itself as well as furniture arrangements and wall displays. In addition, I contextualize the methods of welfare workers embedded in mill communities with the practices endorsed by Protestant ideals of Evangelical womanhood. Thus, this section highlights connective tissue holding together expressed Christian beliefs in the value of personal literacy practices and the literacy sponsorship of mill women as a process tied to social and cultural capital. Religion has been referenced throughout this chapter and the one preceding it, particularly in the expressed moral imperative to “save” rural Appalachian whites through industrial labor and company towns. In this final section I draw out the relationship between ideas of femininity upheld by many female reformers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and papers from mill welfare workers to suggest that these gender ideologies were significant to understand the transitions welfare workers advocated for mill women.
Monaghan Mills was the YWCA’s first mill program in the mountain-region of Greenville, South Carolina in 1904. The archived scrapbook documenting the organization’s presence in the mill’s village is comprised of black and white photographs, worn with age and pasted into a bound book with black pages; most pictures are labeled with white ink in the careful handwriting of what was likely a YWCA welfare worker in the village. Activities represented in the scrapbook are varied, including pictures of cooking and sewing classes for girls and adult women, group portraits of mill women, formal portraits of YWCA welfare workers at Monaghan, and photos of mill buildings and the Secretary’s Cottage. Pictures also show women and men outdoors walking, eating watermelons, and lounging on fallen logs to balance pictures of women studying cookery, illustrating the organization’s role in structuring leisure activities. In addition to showcasing the people who populated the mill hill, the scrapbook offers insight into how welfare workers imagined physical and social space through visual representations. Photographs also indicate the value of literacy as a signifier of habitus within the mill village through visual depictions of text in both the Secretary’s Cottage and the Reading Room set up in the mill village for women.

34 Although the YWCA dates its work in Monaghan to the year 1904, photographs from the scrapbook are dated as early as 1900, indicating that the organization did have some sort of presence from the earliest days of the mill’s operations.
The Scrapbook functions as a literacy event in two ways: 1) its object life as a literacy artifact or a text produced by the literate labor of welfare workers and; 2) its portrayals of reading and writing as an activity in which mill women participated and valued. Although there is no way to determine the authorship of the book, it was likely created at least in part by welfare workers at Monaghan, as the events depicted center around the mill’s welfare work program. Further circulation data on the object life of this artifact is not available, clouding its intended audience. I suggest this text, while not alphabetic in the same way as The Cookery Text Book, is another example of how female reformers produced visual aids to create a sense of habitus within the mill village. Even amongst the uncertainties of the object’s explicit purpose, it highlights aspects of life within the mill village and therefore is significant to better understanding the connection.
between literacy and the creation of social space. In particular, studying the selection of some photographs for inclusion in the text indicate the priorities of Secretaries and the integration of literacy practices in their work to improve living conditions of women and their families in the southern mills.

Figure 5: Secretaries’ Living Room, 1905. Y.W.C.A. Scrapbook. YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

As the scrapbook photographs show how physical place indicates social space through visual documentation (as opposed to alphabetic text), this artifact represents the use of visual and tactile literacies to compliment other alphabetic literacies in helping women navigate the social world. For example, women did not just read about how the state of their homes indicates community membership; they were also invited to spend time in the Secretary’s Cottage, as illustrated in the scrapbook, to materially experience socially acceptable social spaces. A document from 1907 circulating internally in the
YWCA describes Secretary’s cottages in South Carolina villages as “object lessons” for mill women. This positioning supports a framework in which both the depictions in the Scrapbook and the physical structures in the photos become literacy events and even social primers:

The secretary’s home is a cottage such as operatives live in and is simply furnished so that it may serve as a model. The kind of furniture used is within the reach of all operatives and gives suggestions along the line of home-made articles. [...] The home is appreciated, but it has a greater mission than being a mere pleasure to those who visit it. As a model it has been serving its purpose. Little things have been imitated and some who have gone into homes of their own have used the model as a guide in furnishing their houses. The Association has a large field in the mill village in giving this object lesson and helping in other ways to make homes. (Long 6-7)

These comments echo an earlier report from Pearl Wyche of Proximity and White Oaks Mills in North Carolina, part of the larger Cone Manufacturing Company, which was published in the Textile Manufacturers’ Journal in 1905. Wyche writes of weekly meetings in the mill village for mothers and home-makers, some of which occurred in the Secretary’s Cottage at Proximity. The building served as “an object lesson of simplicity and neatness. Most of the furniture is home made, and nothing too expensive for even the poorest to afford” (“At Proximity” 3). In other words, literacy sponsors used a variety of texts and ways of “reading” to teach habitus, including alphabetic texts like The Cookery Text Book, visuals like the photographs in the Scrapbook, and even the physical structure of the Secretary’s Cottage and the furniture found within it.
As the intention of the cottage space was to set an example for mill women, the presence of alphabetic texts in the photos of living spaces within the cottage is significant to note. Within many pictures displayed in the scrapbook, magazines and books are prominently set on tables while samplers and other decorative items that contain illegible text hang on walls. Additionally, a writing desk is situated in a photograph of the Secretary’s sitting room, indicating practices of reading and writing that could both be private and indicate correspondence with others. It is important to note that texts do not necessarily equate to literacy practices in a household, but the presence of reading materials does imply alphabetic literacy was advocated and normalized by welfare workers. Books and magazines were also a part of the social spaces and habitus that Secretaries modeled. This is further supported in the scrapbook by photos of a “Library and Reading Room,” which appears well stocked with a variety of reading materials. The photo shows six women with stylish clothing and hairstyles reading and interacting with one another in a space decorated with lamps, rocking chairs, and a long table for study (see Figure 5). To compliment these photographs, the cited presence of libraries in both Monaghan and Proximity Mills indicate literacy’s role in community uplift; Wyche boasted the facilities at Proximity held “several thousand volumes” for use in 1905 (“At Proximity” 4, see also “Annual Statement, 1906” 7 and Figure 1).

Literacy events, in the form of textual production and consumption, were then clearly valued by literacy sponsors in the visual and discursive representations of mill village life created by the YWCA and others for internal and external circulation. This value was drawn in part from the Progressive views of education often subscribed to by welfare workers and some mill owners, which the previous chapter referenced in relation
to the economic investment in welfare work. To compliment these ideologies, though, many welfare workers also reference their own religious affiliations in relation to the value of literacy learning, which I suggest relates to the circulation and accumulation of social and cultural capital. A document from the Association’s Training School, dated 1909, specifically outlines the challenges and the successes of cotton mill village programs while highlighting the significance of the organization’s Protestant roots. In particular, the document states: “all departments of the mill Association converge in the religious department. In this line of work as in no other […] the Association is carrying out the principle of love as laid down by the Master–loving (and teaching others to love) one another as he loved us” (“The Work” 4). This quote emphasizes the idea of love, an ethics of care, and empathy for mill workers who lived in poverty, nestled amongst reports of “teaching a practical, everyday Christianity” that included “Sunday meetings with good speakers or Bible study” and “Bible classes” (“The Work” 4). Literacy learning accompanied religious teachings within the YWCA’s programs.

The connection between women’s benevolent work, literacy campaigns, and Protestant religion in the nineteenth century is taken up by Anne Boylan in her essay, “Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools.” Although the essay is somewhat dated, Boylan re-creates an understanding of women’s educational work during this time period, particularly when spurred on by religious commitments, that captures both the revolutionary and the conservative spirit in efforts by women including those conducting welfare work for the YWCA. More specifically, Boylan juxtaposes the socially active “evangelical womanhood,” the leading feminine ideology within some nineteenth and twentieth century Protestant circles, with
the more passive, “lady-like” ideology of the Cult of True Womanhood, frequently depicted in nineteenth century literature (62). Women of means who experienced religious conversions to Protestant sects during the period following the Great Awakening (1790-1835) “rejected prevailing ideas about women and created new ideals rooted in evangelical Protestantism.” These shifts also led women to “f[nd institutional means of enacting and promulgating their new ideals,” often through institutions like the YWCA that were run by women to explicitly bring social and cultural guidance to women and girls (Boylan 64, 76). These organizations employed literacy campaigns housed in Sunday Schools or other forms of welfare work to “save young womanhood,” addressing the millions of “unconverted” young women identified by the YWCA in inner-city factories and spaces like southern mill hills (“YWCA” 1).

Social benevolent work materially signified Protestant women’s religious beliefs, according to their private writings, giving them a sense of usefulness and illustrating their rejection of a “frivolous” life of “fashionmongering” identified with some female gender roles (Boylan 65). In fact, the frivolous use of money is a characteristic identified by Lillian Long from the YWCA as marking the two lower “classes” of mill workers, who “are naturally improvident, moving often and carelessly spending money, so that they are unable to meet obligations” and who “[care] little for reputation and [are] utterly reckless” (“The Southern Cotton Mill” 3-4). Further, reflecting the Protestant ideals of hard work and thrift, Long writes:

It has been said that ‘the best kind of charity is not that which makes a man easy in destitution but uneasy in it—uneasy enough to struggle out of it by the aid of a friendly hand.’ The company is always ready to relieve any suffering and the
Association has been a means of making needs known and of getting the necessary aid. After assistance has been given ‘uneasiness’ is encouraged. Families are helped only until they can help themselves and then are advised to make preparation for future needs. (8-9)

While welfare work focused on the physical appearance of place and the way that appearance was read in social terms, female reformers entering mill villages took on a missionary zeal in providing “the strong and sympathetic [type] of loving women to those less favored and provides for the welfare of body, mind and spirit in a most acceptable way” (Long 14). It is clear that amongst this zeal, literacy campaigns addressed learners’ material needs but might also have related to the affective needs of learners and sponsors, the latter of which appear to have tried to form relationships with their students.

As welfare workers and other women conducting benevolent work encouraged their pupils to understand their physical and social space in different ways, middle-class reformers experienced a similar shift in their own understanding of habitus in conversation with the nineteenth century rise in Protestantism and movements for temperance and women’s suffrage. But while these changes proposed radical alterations in the public social roles and individual experiences of white women of means, Boylan reminds us, as do Ginzberg and Fritz, that these new roles remained tied to domestic spaces and women’s biological and social roles as mothers and wives. Reformers teaching literacy to rural and urban women, running Settlement houses, and more generally performing benevolent work folded a sense of social action into their own ideas of womanhood. This move combined Protestant teachings of “prudence, frugality, . . . industriousness,” and pious evangelism with images of “women as nurturing, sensitive . . .
... [and] more aware than man of injustice” (Boylan 65). The use of literacy learning to further evangelical goals as well as uplift women and girls more generally is made apparent in Boylan’s emphasis on Sunday Schools, Bible classes, and teacher training; it is also made clear in the archived papers of the YWCA As women were converted to Christianity and took on elements of Evangelical womanhood, they shared greater social ties with one another—as reformer and mill woman—through common knowledge and social networks.

To complicate this moment in literacy education, according to Cook-Gumperz schooled literacy was also framed as a social necessity to train workers for factory labor during this period of Industrialization in the US (25-32). Thus, we see places of competing ideologies within conversations between mill owners who economically sponsored literacy campaigns within mill villages to increase profits and welfare workers who socially and culturally sponsored literacy campaigns to cultivate social and cultural capital through expressions of social space. Historical studies suggest that literacy instruction was not a direct link to increased economic capital for learners working in factories and in the mills (McHugh). Social and cultural capital may have increased through such instruction though, as educational efforts changed one’s standing within the larger social space through social refinement that made a woman “fit” to direct a household and led her to religious salvation. A girl—or working woman—who was considered saved had improved her life through the introduction of religion, even if she continued to live in poverty. These improvements also positioned her within different communities, aligning her with welfare workers instead of the rural networks from whence she came. We do not have access to women’s reflections on this realignment (or
attempts thereof) making it impossible to make statements about the extent to which it was successful. Studying the documents produced by literacy sponsors, however, allows us to identify realignment as an explicit goal of learning campaigns, and it allows us to access more esoteric forms of capital—social and cultural—as they were intended to impact communities, regardless of how they actually did. It is in this statement that we see the absolute significance and need for studies of literacy learners in communion with studies of sponsors: intention in literacy campaigns is more difficult to access through learners, while impact is more difficult through sponsors.

The missionary fervor of the organization formulated a sense of urgency around teaching literacy and other courses to working women, illustrated in the YWCA’s internal magazine, *The Evangel*. An article from 1892 by Katherine Penfield titled “The Intellectual Needs of Our City Girls” explains: “Education . . . will teach [girls] that ignorance is sin if there is a chance to remove it. Influence that will be to them a revelation into a new world of simple living and high thinking . . . education that will teach them their relation to the nation’s growth” (qtd in Penfield 12). Although this text was produced almost a decade before the YWCA entered the Monaghan Mills village, it shows the ideologies within which southern welfare workers operated and the ways that the Association addressed diverse populations in its work, including urban women workers, immigrant populations, and rural southern women. As literacy learning was accompanied by physical education classes to counter the “limited” ways girls moved in their daily labor, welfare work sought “to fit the girl for the noble sphere of housekeeping, and . . . furnish other means than those now open for her for earning a living, means which may prove invaluable to her should she be deprived of her present
employment” (Penfield 13). Courses developed skills to make women more employable while valuing women’s position in “the noble sphere of house keeping” more than her position as an industrial laborer. This emphasis reflects the ideologies of evangelical womanhood, recognizing women’s public roles in labor while stressing their private roles in the home. Further, while Penfield gestures towards movement in social position related to one’s paid labor “should she be deprived of her present employment,” illustrating the need for cultural capital through workplace training, literacy learning additionally increases one’s social capital through the cultivation of a higher class of womanhood. These beliefs mirrored the reality of early generations of mill workers and other industrial laborers during this time period, when mill work was referred to as “almost hereditary” because upward mobility (or mobility beyond the mill hill) was very difficult, especially for women (Lahne qtd in McHugh 96).

**Conclusion**

Literacy learning, cultural capital circulated in formal education, and social capital and the refinement of habitus are all explicitly brought together in benevolent work in southern cotton mill villages. Welfare workers, as literacy sponsors, not only hoped to further women’s abilities to read and write through the classes they taught; they also strove to assist them in living different, better lives. These new lives embraced a very specific sense of physical places and social spaces, positioning mill women within a higher, more moral space than what they were thought to inhabit on their own. This “uplift,” highlighted by welfare workers in the lives of women and families from the Appalachian region, brought both socially acknowledged ways of knowing and allowed reformers to embrace mill women as fellow white Christian women, who cooked the
same foods, read the same texts, and lived amongst the same arrangements of furniture. Unfortunately the working conditions of most southern cotton mills limited most workers’ pursuit of education, but it is clear that as welfare workers acted as literacy sponsors within these spaces, they saw their work as extending well past the ability of some women to read and write. Their work was about perceptions of human potential, reflecting gender, race, and class onto the women who participated in their programs.

Welfare work’s focus on changing factors related to lifestyle, gender, and the domestic space through educational efforts was praised for “quietly do[ing] a great work” to counter the geographic isolation associated with the mountaineer and the recognized exploitation of workers (“The Work” 1-2, 4). Additionally, women’s charitable endeavors to improve the lives of working class people supplemented the limited resources and small income that accompanied industrial labor. But the absence of economic capital in the motivations and practices of welfare workers within the mill does not necessarily mean that the ideology of accumulation was absent from their work, even as benevolent work took on the rhetoric and ideologies of charity and service to those in need. As Hennessy points out, capitalist ideologies are fluid and frequently absorb more radical practices, normalizing them and incorporating them within capitalist methods of production (Profit 19-20). For this reason, I suggest welfare work moved against the exploitation of workers by providing them with needed services and resources as it simultaneously created conditions making their exploitation possible.

The reference to welfare work as “quiet” supports Ginzberg’s earlier analysis of women’s benevolent work as invisible. As mill women were framed as Anglo-Saxon, social shifts amongst mill populations were represented in natural terms; once given the
opportunity, the social class dormant in their racial identity seems to blossom. Shifts in habitus mark the circulation and accumulation of social and cultural capital, as mill women are cited displaying styles illustrating awareness and embracing of middle class, white, and Protestant identities forwarded by welfare work. Long, of the YWCA, reports: “a marked change in the people [of mill villages resulting from welfare work]. Girls and women who were included to be careless in personal appearance are no longer so” and “home-making and housekeeping have been much improved” (13). The Association further tells its trainees: “Many a girl who did not know that she was careless in dress or personal appearance has been transformed without her knowledge. The young women make fancy waists, bows, hats, etc. Given an embroidered waist, a woman unconsciously chooses the rest of her apparel accordingly” (“The Work” 4). This process of transformation seems to happen without any conflict at all; in fact mill women do not even seem to notice changes in their choice of apparel, as the introduction of one article of clothing leads to additional changes on an unconscious level. These representations certainly had a rhetorical purpose to gain additional support from mill administrators and the YWCA itself. In addition, these representations likely assured the continued financial support from mill administrators and the general public.

Truman Vance writes of Cone Mills’s welfare work, which impacted 500 women weekly, that aside from increased “style” in the clothing women made for their children, “the results of this work are seen everywhere, and the subtle influence that cannot be seen is even greater” (4-5, emphasis mine). Further, a YWCA worker reporting of her experience in Pennsylvania claims:
A girl who is studying English or arithmetic, or how to sew or cook, or who is learning how to care for her body, or how to read and study her Bible, is doing more than merely training her mind and her fingers; she is training her heart—moulding her character. And when she leaves the building she has a greater desire to live a pure life than she had perhaps when she went in. The atmosphere of refinement and love about the house always tells. (Open Letters 15)

This undated statement was published by the Association alongside photographs from the Monaghan Scrapbook mentioned earlier to suggest links in the industrial work in Pennsylvania factories and the welfare work of southern mill villages. These statements indicate the potential of literacy campaigns to impact not only the intellectual capacities of learners, but also their “heart.” While YWCA welfare workers and others presented their work in-line with the ideals of Christian love, a sentiment that was likely very genuine for many, in trying to re-write social space and habitus in the mill village, this work also reproduced social and economic hierarchies that devalued rural ways of living and knowing represented in stereotypes of Appalachian populations.

It is in this intention to rewrite where I suggest the reproduction of social violence resides, echoing Hall, Korstad and Leloudis that social programs within the mill industry aimed to appropriate community life in the mill village (264). The motivations of welfare workers were certainly complex and strongly rooted in social and religious duty; they were gendered, raced, and classed in ways that positioned white women of means as ideal candidates to buffer the impact of industrialization on rural whites. But we cannot view their work outside of the framework of industrial capitalism and the desires of mill administrators to produce better workers through educational and social programs in the
mill village. For these reasons, even as welfare workers may have had what they considered the best of intentions, they serve as a historical example of how literacy sponsors impact learners beyond their intent, in this instance by enabling exploitation and the reproduction of social difference. Of course the papers of women like Lillian Long and Pearl Wyche make it clear that a myriad of social and cultural changes were a significant part of their work on the mill hill. In the next chapter, I begin to explore some of the ways that mill women used literacy practices in their lives as consumers and workers to begin to complicate the impact of welfare work and its intentions and to restore agency to learners.
CHAPTER 5
A PEEK THROUGH THE BLINDS: LEARNERS AND LITERACIES ON THE MILL HILL

When I began this research, I was especially interested in how literacies were appropriated by women in mill villages and used for purposes that might be understood as resisting the highly controlled social spaces of many company towns. Feminist historiographies help us to recognize resistance in sites that may have previously been considered mundane, looking at domestic spaces differently to suggest that even amongst the experience of exploitation there are opportunities for agency. In addition, materialist and transnational feminist theory is also vital for understanding not only how women’s lives and labors have historically been erased, but also how they have maintained a sense of community and self within different contexts.

In creating a transnational feminist praxis that draws heavily on materialist frameworks, Chandra Mohanty identifies six ways in which “women” are constructed as a “category of analysis” in Western feminist scholarship. The construction most pertinent to this project is the clustering of women as “victims of the economic development process,” a move that Mohanty warns collapses populations of individual and diverse women and reproduces social hierarchies (23). More specifically, she states:

This mode of defining women primarily in terms of their object status (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems) is what characterizes this particular use of ‘women’ as a category of analysis. In the context of Western women writing/studying women in the Third World, such objectification (however benevolently motivated) needs to be both named and
challenged. As Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar argue quite eloquently, ‘Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as ‘feudal residues’ or label us ‘traditional,’ also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism. They need to be continually challenged.’ (Mohanty 23-24)

Although my work examines literacy sponsorship to open up discussions about literacy distribution in new ways, this orientation risks identifying women “in terms of their object status” as defined by Mohanty, and therefore is positioned as potentially socially violent even as it highlights the social violence done to others through some literacy campaigns. Throughout the previous chapters I have worked against this position, using intersectional frameworks of identity, contextualizing and historicizing the time, place, and constructions of identities addressed in this project, and seeking ways that capitalist progress was naturalized in the narrative of the New South (Hennessy, Mohanty 30, 48). This methodology, along with additional practices and considerations explored in detail in Chapter 2, have allowed me to begin to create a rich tapestry exploring some model mills in North and South Carolina and the ways that literacies were hoped to impact women living and working there, particularly as they were framed as hailing from the southern Appalachians.

In this last chapter, I move away from documents produced by literacy sponsors to consider how women used alphabetic literacy practices to identify themselves and their communities apart from the institutions and industry that built the villages where they lived. To do so, I examine where places of tension are visible in worker writing between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives: places where alternative narratives
surface. In reading worker writing for this purpose, it should be noted, “it is the way in which [texts] are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance. After all, it is not just to record one’s history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant” (Mohanty 77-78). By contextualizing as best we can the conditions around the production of text by mill women and their families, we not only avoid reifying the artifacts (or the people who produced them), but gain access to the complex ways in which writing might signal points of resistance to economic, social, and cultural exploitation. Finally, historicizing mill women’s literacy practices against the backdrop of sponsorship in the preceding chapters proposes that these points of resistance mark moments where the skills mill families were taught to make them better workers also created spaces for resistance and the simultaneous recording of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives of mill history.

Few texts are actually available to conduct this kind of work. But in the sections that follow I use the concept of “rural literacies” to guide my reading of texts produced by women and others to build literacies that create and sustain a sense of community separate from the welfare work forwarded by the southern mill industry. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell define rural literacies as: “the particular kinds of literate skills needed to achieve the goals of sustaining life in rural areas – or, to use Brandt's terms, to pursue the opportunities and create the public policies and economic opportunities needed to sustain rural communities” (4). In this way, while I recognize how corporate literacy campaigns strove to move women towards a different kind of culture within the mill village, for example, learning to think about food using standard measurements found in
the *Cookery Text Book*, this chapter further considers how literacies impacted the ways mill women and their families cultivated community amongst themselves.

The term “rural” identifies communities in three ways: quantitatively in regards to population, geographically in regards to regions, and culturally in regards to groups and communities (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 2). In this way, the use of the word in my project conjures a region and culture, highlighting the ways of being workers and their families transported into the social space of the mill hill and honoring the strong sense of heritage that accompanied them. I further suggest we consider mill spaces as sites where rural and middle-class town literacies came into contact through the company-sponsored campaigns. While we can certainly understand literacy events like the Monaghan Scrapbook and the *Cookery Text Book* as locations for this contact, in this chapter I focus on alternative touchstones: notes and Bible pages from mill workers used to verify the ages of working children; mill-sponsored newspapers like the *Durable-Durham Doings* that attempted to create an outlet for worker writing; and oral histories that created a written voice for non-literate women. Thus, we might consider how rural literacies may have their origins in mill-sponsored campaigns, in this chapter I suggest the ways literacy skills are taken up by mill women and their families creates a contradiction between how sponsors hoped literacies might be used and how learners embedded them in their daily lives.

Although I employ the practice of archival accretion through critical imagination and strategic contemplation throughout this project, in this last chapter these methods are very significant. More specifically, it is here that I examine what traces of worker writing have survived from the period of this study and slightly beyond to expand the
conversation to literacy learners within southern mill villages. This is perhaps the most difficult of all the chapters in this project and it is fitting that it should come last, as it leaves us in the final years of my examination, during a time of change within the southern mill industry following the First World War. For these reasons, the artifacts presented here are best framed as jumping off points for future explorations, suggesting directions in which this research might expand in the future.

“This is to Certify”: Literacies and the Working Status of Children

To start, examples of worker writing are found in the Cannon Manufacturing Company Series at Duke University that help us begin to imagine ways literacy practices were used to form alternative histories. Documents produced to construct family history are particularly interesting for this investigation, as they illustrate concrete examples of mill village residents using writing to create and utilize spaces created for the recording of kinship networks outside of mill control. More specifically, the documents examined in this section not only logged the details of these networks, but also did so in a way that produced factual documentation used by laborers to certify the ages of working children to mill and federal authorities during a period of shifting child labor laws. This is evidenced by the dates of the artifacts around 1917, the year in between the passing of the Keating-Owen Child Labor Bill, which granted the federal government the ability to regulate child labor between its appearance in 1916, and its repeal two years later in 1918 (“Ending Child Labor”). In addition, these papers are located within a larger progression of documents from 1917 to 1927 that narrate changes in North Carolina’s child labor laws and the company’s scramble to verify (or identify at all) the ages of younger employees. This context indicates their function as legal tools for families advocating for
the paid employment of their children as they also served to create and maintain familial networks.\footnote{It is significant to note that these correspondences took place during the First World War, a time during which many men were called to fight while an increase in the demand for textiles created an economic boom for the industry. Strangely enough, the war effort did not have a strong presence in the archival documents I worked with, but there is evidence of difficulties finding laborers as the war and stricter child labor laws collided in 1917. Particularly telling is a letter from J. W. Cannon, of Cannon Mills, explaining his decisions to hire “negro women” as sweepers and scrubbers in his facilities in Kannapolis, NC. Cannon mentions that although he hired them for $1.25 a day, the recipient of his letter may be able to do the same for $1.00 in his mills in Thomasville. Additionally, Cannon references hiring “men” (as opposed to “boys”) to work as doffers to avoid issues with child labor laws (“Letter to O. G. Wagstaff” 1). With fewer children eligible for employment in the mills and males in the household joining the war effort, we see conditions under which families might push for the employment of their teenage children to maintain household incomes.}

As federal and state representatives entered the mills to ensure all employees were of legal age for employment, which was 16 for full-time work under the Keating-Owen Bill, workers were asked to produce written proof of their age (or the age of their children). According to the traces left in the Cannon Mill Series, this proof took the form of family Bibles that recorded the birthdays of children, handwritten notes from parents with the year of their children’s births, life insurance policies that listed births, and occasionally documents like birth certificates. Therefore, workers utilized literacy practices in a variety of ways to advocate for their children’s employment. By contextualizing these documents within the Cannon Series, I suggest we may complicate these literacy events to consider how they presented counter-hegemonic narratives alongside the hegemonic narratives they responded to. Thus, while literate workers at Cannon had the skills necessary to comply with mill policies and federal law to prove the age of their working children, a closer reading of these documents suggests that they served a variety of counter hegemonic purposes to maintain kinship networks and subvert newly enforced labor laws to increase household income.
These sites of struggle are historicized within larger tensions over child labor, which seemed to come to a head in the 1910’s in the southern mill industry. Perceptions of child labor were often split between conversations about the “rights” of children to work (and contribute often much-needed income to their households) and concern for the exploitation of children that made it difficult for them to pursue schooling and other endeavors. The pursuit of education and literacy training for children was often cited by mill families as a highly valued aspect of life on the mill village, though the material conditions of industrial labor and exploitation often made the income of children necessary for households to sustain (Campbell “The Mountain People” 26-29, Moore 132, 157-158). In addition, oral histories collected for the Southern Oral History Project at UNC include the memories of some former workers who enjoyed millwork more than school or housework and childcare (Carter 8, Austin 1). These conversations blur the ways we tend to understand child labor; although the practices were exploitative, families and even child workers themselves may have had reasons to advocate for paid labor.

As mills were faced with the burden of proving the ages of their workers, they turned to the parents of younger employees for documentation. As much of this proof was produced in the home, the process of certifying the age of employees created an opportunity for mill women and their families to produce evidence of birth dates. This evidence, in written form, exemplifies a space in which families both complied with administrative requirements and potentially exerted resistance as information could be easily falsified to ensure the continued wages of members of the household. For example, in northern textile mills, workers are understood to have “routinely organized to outwit

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36 These oral histories, which were generally gathered in the 1970’s and 1980’s, are difficult to fit into this project because their timelines are often unknown.
impossible laws … [as] the discovery of an underaged worker was a time of uncertainty and crisis, for it threatened to sever the precarious threads women had spun to sustain life” (Cameron 67). Workers were identified as using the certification papers for older family members to certify the age of children in the absence of photographic identification and one social worker is quoted as claiming, ‘How little value can be placed upon the mother’s oath in this respect is notorious’ (qtd. in Cameron 67). Additionally, factories themselves were frequently accused of enabling child labor (against state and federal regulations), most notably through the practice of physically hiding underage workers from inspectors or by framing them as “helpers” visiting their parents37 (“The McKelway Testimony” 3, “Hines Statement was False” 10). The work of verifying the legal age of children seems to have offered a variety of challenges for all the parties involved.

These practices are referenced in southern mill communities as well. In particular, we see distrust over the validity of documents presented to administrators in Harriet Herring’s undated interview with Mr. Brown, the County Welfare Agent in Cabarrus, North Carolina. Herring describes Brown as indifferent to families using a sworn affidavit to prove the age of their working children as opposed to . This indifference is based on Brown’s observation that “parents who want to put the children to work too early can just as easily fix up a record that will pass the legal requirements anyway”

37 Perhaps the best example of the sudden disappearance of child workers is in Dawley’s reports on the industry previously mentioned. Dawley was originally hired to report to the federal government about child labor in southern mills during the first decade of the twentieth century. After extensive field work though, he claimed that children were rarely employed at the factories he visited throughout the textile south. Consequently, as his work did not coincide with the desired results Congress sent him to find (Dawley, The Child 280, 474-477), it was not used and according to Dawley himself was kept silent (484-487). Given the period of his study and its breadth, it is virtually impossible to imagine that he did not encounter mills where child labor was taking place, emphasizing the likelihood that these practices were obscured from the reporter’s view as well as the highly political nature of the child labor debate.
Brown’s recognition of forgery as highly accessible to workers emphasizes that although families may have produced documents including written notes and pages from family Bibles to comply with mill and federal legislation, the possibility to manufacture these documents to falsify information existed simultaneously, as families used the documents for their own ends.

In her interview notes, Herring responds to Brown’s comments with her own observations that the “religious tendency” of mill workers led her to believe “[workers] would rather manufacture an evidence of age and submit it without ado than to swear on the Bible [for an affidavit] what they know to be a lie” (“Mr. Brown” 1). The contradiction between workers falsifying documents and the Christian doctrine of truth-telling emphasizes decisions to intentionally produce inaccurate documents carried potential consequences for workers beyond the discipline of their employers, though the benefits of additional household income may have prevailed for some families.

There is no evidence to directly suggest that the handwritten notes in the Cannon files were themselves falsified—an important fact to emphasize—but the notes do provide an example of documentation produced by families that might have served these alternative purposes. The letters are short and to the point, containing very limited explanatory text beyond the necessary names and birth dates of children. For example, “Letter from Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Davis” states: “This is to certify that Mamie Davis our daughter was born November the 11th 1901” (1). The note is then signed in what appear to be two different handwritings, one for H. C. Davis and one for Mrs. H. C. Davis. While the note is not dated, it is amongst papers in the collection from 1917, a date which would make Mamie 16 years old and eligible for full time work according to federal
legislation. Additionally, the handwriting in the note appears to more directly correspond to the handwriting in H. C. Davis’ signature, suggesting Mr. Davis produced the text.

If we consider the Davis letter as a broader example of how literacy was used by some mill families to further the “formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity” and produce sites for “struggle,” using Mohanty’s words, then we may read beyond its immediate function in an act of critical imagination. Thus, as we better access literate practices in the mills, regardless of whether they were performed by men or women, we may see how in some cases they may have simultaneously complied with and challenged mill and federal regulations. The fuller stories behind the Davis family and their daughter Mamie’s labor experiences have been obscured in this collection, including the voice of Mamie herself. That being said, the letter does articulate the right of Mamie to work and the family’s desire (or need) for her employment and income. It is impossible to determine from just the documents within the Series the extent to which the note represents a site for resistance or is merely a family complying with new regulations, but it is a potential site for struggle, illustrating that literacy acts are not neutral. Thus, families may have manufactured documents including notes or even pages from family Bibles in an effort to resist the legislation imposed on their families in acts of agency that produced counter hegemonic narratives in mill and labor history. These acts were expressed in the spaces created through the production of alphabetic text and allowed mill families to abide by hegemonic practices or produce counter-hegemonic histories that forwarded their own interests at the possible expense of their employers.

As workers used literacy to create spaces for resistance within their workplace, I suggest artifacts like the family record written on the page of a Bible belonging to the
Evans family might also be read as sites where residents of the mill hill exerted agency through the production of factual documentation of kinship. This assertion is especially potent amongst claims that mill welfare work strove to realign community in villages to center on the mill itself, exemplified in the analysis of welfare work and literacy in Chapter 4, as reformers strove to shift the food habits of mill families away from regional practices and towards standardized practices of cookery science. Literacy practices encouraged by sponsors shaped the kinds of cultural and social capital exhibited by mill women and their families, implicating a sense of peoplehood that reflected hegemonic gendered, classed, and raced characteristics. While the recording of biological and kinship relationships by mill families may not have immediately countered these attempts of the mill to construct community, I suggest they are significant in their creation of a history and sense of pastness and identity beyond the grasp of the industry or the reformers working within it.

In appearance, the archived double-sided page from the Evans’ Bible has ragged edges, including one that appears to have been ripped from the bound book where the document was originally housed. On one side, a “Family Record” traces the births of ten members of the Evans family, beginning with H. W. Evans on February 2, 1862 and ending with Craven H. Evans on May [day obscured], 1910 (‘Evans’ Family Bible’). Names and dates are handwritten in black ink in a printed table bordered by golden peace lilies. The reverse side contains a certification of matrimony, though the specific information it conveys is less clear; only one name appears on the page alongside two years, 1891 and 1910. Further, the form itself prompts the writer for the year of marriage, denoted as: “19____” (“Evans Family Bible”). The range of birthdates listed on the
“Family Record” make it difficult to date the artifact, but the book appears to have been purchased after 1900 and therefore is unlikely from a Bible that was present in the family for long (this is also evident as the page only covers 48 years of time, from 1862 to 1910).

This artifact is significant for my analysis of literacy on multiple levels, beginning with its function within rural kinship networks. Recording names in the Bible reflects a practice of rural literacies, sustaining group identities as families who moved into company towns worked to maintain ties to their heritage and a sense of pastness. David Nord’s study of antebellum religious tracts and rural readers identifies this practice through reports by Princeton seminary students who distributed Christian readings and Bibles in the Pine Barrens of Pennsylvania and other regions including Appalachia during the nineteenth century. While the encounters of the colporteurs provide a diverse understanding of how books circulated and functioned in these rural spaces, several residents of the area “owned (or desired) Bibles only to write their children’s names in them” (Nord “Religious Reading” 260). While the seminary students did not value this usage appropriate for the sacred texts they encountered, it illustrates one way in which writing may facilitate the “formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. [As textual production] becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself” (Mohanty 78). In other words, while Bibles were distributed amongst populations for one set of institutional purposes—most directly for religious conversion and practice—the findings of Nord’s research suggest that literacy learners used the texts for alternative functions, including the writing and re-writing of pastness and peoplehood. Keeping written records of ancestry created a sense of connectivity within a family. For this
reason, while the positioning of the page from the Evans family in the Cannon Papers suggests it was used to certify the age of children for work, it also represents the use of literacy to track the family, which may have been spread over multiple geographic locations.

Finally, although I suggest we might imagine the use of literacy events like those referenced in this section throughout the history of the industry in the south, it is appropriate that they begin to surface in these years of the industry’s archived history. In particular, these artifacts highlight a move towards reconsidering the management of employees in cotton mills during the years following WWI, specifically through decreases in welfare work programs and more emphasis on individual responsibility of workers to determine their own futures. This shift appears to have presented more visible opportunities for workers to use literacy practices to create a sense of identity, particularly as the documents like the Evans Family Bible transitioned from the domestic space as a private document of family networks to a public document used to certify the age of the family’s children.

Transitions that put more emphasis on workers as individuals also coincided with stronger public school programs across the south and transitions in attitudes towards worker education that resulted in organizations over the next decade like the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers (1921) and the Southern Summer School for Industrial Women Workers (1927), among others. The founders of these schools often expressed distrust of “welfare plans of employers” as a way to break up unions across the country (Hilda Shapiro qtd in Hollis 17) and took a more radical approach to worker education to include the study of history, labor rights, and English literature and
composition. Thus, we see potential roots for these more radical programs in the literacy practices described here, as workers both produced documents to further their own interests and find cracks in mill regulations alongside literacies functioning to maintain and cultivate community and kinship networks within the mill village.

“We are the girls of the Geo. D. line”: Worker Literacy Practices in the *Durable-Durham Doings*

This chapter also works to produce value around worker writing as sites for exploring literacy amongst a population difficult to access through conventional historiographic methods. Calling upon the work of transnational feminist researchers alongside the feminist methodologies from Chapter 2, I read artifacts like the handwritten note from Mr. and Mrs. Davis and the Evans Family Bible in Cannon Mills to consider more fully the conditions under which they were constructed. These conditions illuminate possibilities for resistance in the presence of exploitative ideologies forwarded by the industry, as writing became a resource for the subversion of regulations and the formation of identity beyond the mill’s immediate grasp. Although this is only a beginning of this exploration, this chapter helps create a patchwork of worker voices from a variety of sources. Thus, we can see echoes of resilience and resistance as workers advocated for family members through literacy practices that allowed children to work, established and maintained identities and notions of self, and reproduced a sense of choice through consumer culture.

Other literacy events illustrating forums where workers used literacy skills to create both a sense of common identity and narratives that countered hegemonic mill regulations and ideologies appear in issues of the *Durable-Durham Doings* newspaper
(DDD), published by the Durham Hosiery Mills in North Carolina. The circular was initiated as a company-wide publication in 1919 and included submissions from employees and management at the multiple mill sites that made up the larger Durham Hosiery. The newspaper’s first issue, dated February 5, 1919 and titled, What Shall We Call It?, begins with the article, “Scattering Information.” This short piece lays out the intended purpose of the publication, writing from the viewpoint of Durham Hosiery. Specifically, the article states: “[the newspaper] will be a good medium for the interchange of ideas and a stimulus to thought. It will also serve to give the employee[e]s, especially the younger ones, a chance for practice in written composition – a thing which is very much needed” (“Scattering” 1). The newspaper is further described as “just a small sheet giving the happenings of greatest interest to all the workers, with good suggestions about how to improve our conditions and ourselves, interesting stories, funny jokes, puzzles, etc” (“Scattering” 1). The narrator of the article moves back and forth between describing workers in third person and first person plural, emphasizing both distance between the writer (representing the mill) and employees and identification between the two parties. This rhetorical move is significant as the circular aims to create community through shared literacy practices; this community is held together through shared experience and shared identity centered on mill life and labor.

The goal to encourage workers to use literacies to “improve” themselves through cultivating their writing skills (and presumably reading skills as well) to create a community allows us to consider how the paper becomes a unique location for recording hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies at Durham Hosiery. More specifically, in reading articles from the DDD, I strive to illustrate how employee writing in the circular
present “cracks” and “contradictions” (Mohanty 33) to the ideologies forwarded by the mill that encouraged workers to maintain loyalty to the company and take pride in their work as it impacted the public image of the Durham Hosiery Mills brand. When studying the writing of exploited and oppressed populations for these cracks, “one of the most significant aspects of writing against the grain ... is ... the invention of spaces, texts, and images for encoding the history of resistance. Therefore, one of the most significant challenges here is the question of decoding these subversive narratives” (Mohanty 79).

As I considered possible ways handwritten notes and other documents might serve multiple functions in the previous section by responding to new labor regulations as well as subverting them, I suggest the DDD may have also functioned to create a space for workers to both forward and contradict hegemonic narratives of identity. It is important recognize that authorship of the articles presented in this section have not been verified, leaving some speculation as to whether employee writing was in fact written by employees. Thus, while further investigation around the paper itself is necessary to fully flesh out its function within the mill, it does help us imagine ways that such a circular might create a space for multiple narratives to come into contact.

In her study of a local newspaper in eastern Kentucky during the early twentieth century, Samantha NeCamp points out how rural circulars created certain images of their readership through the selection of articles and advertisements published. NeCamp’s own work on The Hazel Green Herald, suggests the paper combated images of Appalachian illiteracy and isolation through its normalization of literacy practices in the daily lives of readers (67, 76). Further, analysis of the paper suggests “the readers of the Herald were not passive followers of the [editor’s] economic or readerly advice,” as they failed (or
refused) to take up special offers for newspaper subscriptions accompanying the purchase of particular books, for example, and occasionally critiqued the paper’s advertising practices in letters that sometimes snuck past The Herald’s editor to air grievances (74, 78). Thus we see the power of local textual production, circulation, and consumption to produce a sense of peoplehood that may also result in sites for ideological resistance, whether related to industrial labor or consumer culture.

This is especially interesting in the context of worker writing in a company-sponsored paper. How were women and other workers able to express resistance to company policies and ideologies with approval of an editorial staff presumably employed to root out these very expressions of opposition? While this section only peripherally begins to address this question, I propose that the DDD provides glimpses of this resistance through the variety of articles circulating multiple narratives of the industry in conversation with each other in issues from 1919. Thus, amongst the repeated themes within the paper of duty and loyalty to the company, I present the DDD as a possible location where workers illustrated the concept of rural literacies and other exhibits of resistance against the mill’s framing of the circular.

There are a limited number of articles in the 1919 editions of the paper that exhibit worker writing that might be read as resistance to the mill, suggesting that the editorial board kept a keen eye on what was published in the circular. In fact, most of the pieces of writing published in the paper are similar to an article by Mrs. Annie Wade from High Point Mill No. 3, which provides an excellent example of the way the company hoped the paper might function. Wade’s short letter claims: “When asked where I work, I have for years answered, ‘At the Durham Hosiery Mill, for the Best
Company there is anywhere.’ I wish that every employee would look at the matter in the right way and give honest work. I hope that you will see fit to keep us reminded through our paper of our duty” (emphasis in original, 3-4). Wade very clearly positions the use of literacy and the circular as a venue for social control, echoing in many ways the beliefs of literacy sponsors that literacy learning would result in more efficient employees who valued “honest work.”

A scan of the articles published in 1919 in the DDD makes it clear that many of the articles published resembled the writing of Mrs. Wade, urging the paper to function to implement social control. This occurred through a combination of employee writing to laud the importance of doing “good” work, being proud of one’s performance, and the cultivation of a belief that mistakes reflected badly on not only the employee who made them, but the company as a whole (for a few examples Tripp 6-7, O’Neil 3 and 5). In a letter submitted from High Point Mill No. 3, for example, Aunt Matilda claims:

We can’t afford to do bad work of any kind because if we do we can not have a clear conscience. When it comes to passing bad work willfully, under the trademark of a company which gives its employees a ‘square deal’ in every way, as does the Durham Hosiery Mills Co., it is nothing short of treason. We should be just as careful to do our work right as we would want it done if we were the owners of the mills. (2)

Instead of aligning community around other workers, Aunt Matilda asks workers to imagine themselves as owners and act accordingly.

This position, as one might imagine, also echoes articles written by the Carr family, who managed the Durham Hosiery Mills, forwarding the ideologies of efficiency,
hard work, and quality products (C. A. Carr 3, E. T. Carr 8). For example, C. A. Carr writes: “There is no great, no small in right and wrong. Whatever is wrong if done to a thousand stockings, is wrong if done to one stocking; and whatever is wrong when carried to its ultimate end is no less wrong in its inception” (3). The emphasis expressed by Aunt Matilda and Carr on worker efficiency and accuracy keep the best interests of the company as the motivating principle to work, reiterating the ways in which worker lives were intertwined with methods of production. It also illustrates how literacy practices were hoped to impact these methods, as workers’ ability to read and write were hoped to make these ways of thinking ingrained.

As we saw welfare work programs using literacies in previous chapters to center mill community around companies and methods of production, the DDD was intended to operate in similar ways, using reading and writing as a method for creating a certain kind of community, in which membership offered certain kinds of social capital for workers. What is so interesting about the circular though, is that while we have no access to women’s responses to the Cookery Text Book in Monaghan Mills, we do have worker writing in the DDD, some of which might be understood as using these same literacies to cultivate community apart from the mill. One such example, in which workers use literacy to confront and re-imagine stereotypes of the “lint head,” is found in a poem from May 15, 1919. The poem is from Annex Mill No. 9 and titled, “What People Have Thought”; the author is unnamed. It begins:

Folks have thought the factory people
Were an unimportant set.
But the reason they thought so
They hadn’t found us yet.

There are people in the factories
    That are noble, true and kind,
And underneath their oily clothes
    Beats a heart with loving mind.

Who will divide with those in need
    If we only have one dime;
We trust the Lord will give it back
    To us some other time.

We claim no treasures here on earth
    In silver, gold, nor rank.
We had rather give to the cause of God
    Than to deposit in the bank.

If we should meet each other
    Where the crystal water flows,
We will have no oil on our hands
    Nor lint on our old clothes. (4)

The poem presents mill workers as generous as they care for one another within their community, emphasizing this function of kinship and religious networks as more
valuable than accumulating material goods or social capital (“rank”). Further, the writer juxtaposes the hardship of life in the mill village with the peace of heaven, where “we will have no oil on our hands / Nor lint on our clothes” (“What People” lines 19-20). With the promise of a better life to come that is free from the markings of manual labor (oil and lint), the poem rejects the collapsing of self as worker that is implied by Mrs. Wade. There is a sense of identity beyond social hierarchy and the position of the exploited worker for this anonymous writer; most significantly, perhaps, this identity exists outside the reach of the Durham Hosiery Mill.

Writing, publication, and circulation of text in “What People Have Thought” all create a counter-narrative, reflecting the growing sense of pride in manual labor identified during the First World War (McCartin 72). This occurs as the poem highlights the values of mill workers at Annex No. 9 and Durham Hosiery Mills more generally, guiding readers to certain aspects of life on the mill hill. As contemporary readers, we might understand some of these values as recreating more problematic writings of workers as passive, though I suggest a feminist praxis might complicate these readings. For example, Christianity within company towns has often been accused of spreading ideologies like those seen in this poem, encouraging worker submission to the harsh realities of industrial labor and town life in exchange for salvation in the afterlife. While this argument certainly has merit, I am interested in the larger function of the literacy event, which addresses other mill workers to discuss the ways the group is depicted by the public in terms of deficit. The poet does not go into detail about this deficit, but phrases describing mill families as “an unimportant set” as well as the repeated reference to the material conditions of their labor (“oily,” “oil,” and “lint”) echo previous
constructions of the mountaineer as dirty and unhygienic, ignorant, and uncultured (lines 2, 7, and 20). The line claiming that these stereotypes are perpetuated because “they haven’t found us yet” turns these tables to show a deficit in the general public who hold these beliefs (line 4). Therefore, the poem both conveys a sense of identity for the “unimportant set” and explains their social position as resulting from the ignorance of others.

Finally, the ways in which the anonymous author portrays mill communities as caring for one another through a willingness to “divide with those in need” (line 9) is of great interest to considering how we might read articles from the DDD as beginning to de-center the mill from community life in mill villages. This reorientation aligns the production of the poem with functions of rural literacies, as neighbors play the role of community support in this poem, returning to a sense of rural kinship networks in which individuals within a group worked together to meet their needs. The sharing of economic capital within the community nods to the growing dependence on consumer culture throughout the US by the twentieth century—and the significance of cash in this economy—but also suggests resistance to this culture, as workers would “rather give to the cause of God / Than to deposit in a bank” (lines 15-16). We see here writing that is both with and against “the grain” as workers participate in a cash economy, but do so with the belief that “the Lord will give it back / To us some other time” (lines 11-12). Christian ideologies might have encouraged workers to accept some aspects of their lives, but they were also taken up to encourage communities to care for each other and counter capitalist ideologies of accumulation.
Calling upon the work of Gloria Anzaldúa to consider the “writing/speaking of multiple consciousness” of Third World women, Mohanty claims understanding agency “requires understanding multiple, often opposing ideas and knowledges, and negotiating these knowledges, not just taking a simple counterstance” (80). Further, resistance “is not always identifiable through organized movements; resistance inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives. Resistance is encoded in the practices of remembering, and of writing. Agency is thus figured in the small, day-to-day practices and struggles of Third World women” (83). Although there are multiple methods for labeling agency in writing, Mohanty’s transnational feminist lens uses the idea of opposition as a guideline; further, as seen in the above example of “What People Have Thought,” we must remember that this opposition might be slight and easy to miss, as by necessity it often co-exists with hegemonic viewpoints. The practice of writing – and publishing – text allows writers to create gaps and fissures as well as circulate beliefs that may counter those of industries and other governing bodies. In these early editions of the Durham Hosiery Mills’ newspaper, we see ways that this opposition might be expressed through literacy practices that highlight sites of struggle that might easily escape the careful editorial eye of the paper.

Another example from the DDD to illustrate tension between the intended use of literacies and their expression as rural literacies used to create and share alternative, grassroots communities is found in a poem by Ardonia Norwood. This artifact is especially valuable as it was submitted from Durham Mill No. 2, a “Colored” mill that was staffed by African Americans, who were rarely employed in southern mills before the Civil Rights Movement. This example, a poem called “The Geo. D Girls,” was
published in the July 15, 1919 issue of the paper. The Durham Mill No. 2 was opened in 1903 and was the first mill in the US to employ African American workers, a major event in an industry formed on the rhetoric of white identity (“Durham Hosiery Mills”).

Therefore, the article is significant as a group of women of color – the Geo. D. Girls – articulate their own sense of peoplehood; I suggest the article expresses both an example of “writing against the grain” and the use of text to create social capital separate from the mill itself. The text of the poem is as follows:

We are the girls of the Geo. D. line,
Trying to do our work nice and fine.
When we are at work, no time to play;
That is why we are happy and gay.

One Friday morning about half past nine,
William H. Hunter put up a sign.
What a shout rose from the Geo. D. hands,
For Mr. T. H. Johnson is our foreman.

We Geo. D. girls are not hard to control,
Tho’ at times we seem a little bold;
When we have no work and are out of our place,

38 It is interesting to note that when the Durham Hosiery Mills established worker representatives as part of their industrial democracy experiment in 1919, Mill No. 2 was the only mill not included in the company’s “House” and “Senate” (“Durham Hosiery Mills”). This observation may further bring into question the actual authorship of the poem and whether or not it was in fact written by a black woman worker in the mill.
Our boss is made – look at his face!

We are very proud of the Geo. D. line,
And we do our best to go by the time.
To go by the time means to do our work right,
Which we’ll try to do with all our might. (Norwood 3)

I quote the poem in its entirety to first try to share as much of the writer’s voice as possible, as it represents a unique moment in my archival findings. It also illustrates well the complexities of representing resistance in the newspaper, as the poem echoes the ideologies of hard work from Mrs. Wade, Aunt Matilda, and the Carrs while also suggesting a mischievousness that complicates the ever-compliant and unselfish life of the mill hand.

This alignment with the mill’s desires for workers to “do our work nice and fine” and “right” produces tension as Norwood also describes women on the factory line as “a little bold” and as leaving their “place” if work is slow (lines 2, 10-11, 15). The carefree tone of the poem suggests a jesting attitude towards the workplace and we get the sense through the poem that while the women are aware of the company’s expectations towards efficiency and high quality production work, they are using the space created by the company newspaper to mock these machine-like expectations. Further, Norwood writes: “When we have no work and are out of our place, / Our boss is made – look at his face!” (lines 11-12). It seems very possible that the word “made” in the last line of the third stanza might be a typo for “mad,” as the poet emphasizes the literal face representing Mill No. 2 and the human aspects of the women’s community on the line. In this way, the
women are responsible to a specific person, Mr. T. H. Johnson according to line 8, and not to the brand of Durham Hosiery.

What emerges from this text is the usage of literacies, which in some cases may have been sponsored by literacy programs in mill villages, to illustrate multiple consciousness in women workers and their families and exhibit agency through the simultaneous recognition of and opposition to mill expectations. Further, the literate practices of Norwood and others illustrate “rural literacies,” as reading and writing identify and sustain a social group that likely functioned to help the women involved meet their affectual and material needs. Interestingly, Norwood’s poem is on the same page as a similar piece, simply attributed to “Folder,” an unnamed employee in the folding room of one of the factories. This poem, from Mill No. 1, is a sort of ode, titled “Our Foreman of the Folding Room.” It takes a similar tone of playfulness in describing the work environment, making light jabs at the department’s supervisor to state:

Our foreman of the folding room

Is a very good fellow indeed;

When business gets on a book

He wants you to pick up speed.

When he begins to get behind with his work –

Boxes of hosiery sitting around on the floor,

He thinks the packers are trying to shirk,

Oh, how it makes him sore!
We are going to try to help him out

By folding each and every pair;

Though we are not so very stout –

We are afraid he will lose his hair.

We hope in some way to catch up this work,

If we only can do so perchance;

Because we know he would not shirk,

For he has no use for “can’ts.” (Folder 3)

Although this second poem does not express the gender of the workers in the folding room, it echoes the cracks for resistance and the complexities of worker identity in Norwood’s poem, speaking back to the paternalistic depictions we saw in previous chapters. In doing so, the poem is sharper than Norwood’s and the author remains protected through anonymity and whiteness, suggested through the poet’s location at Mill No. 1. This sharpness is also echoed in the inclusion of second person in the poem, which emphasizes the divide between foreman and worker more distinctly than Norwood’s use of first person plural, though the expression of doing work to keep the boss happy as opposed to duty or loyalty to the company is clear in both. It is likely the presence of hegemonic ideologies justified the printing of both poems in the first place. In addition, perhaps the DDD editorial staff felt the joking tone in each did not indicate an actual threat to the status quo of administration and workers.

The poems examined are fairly rare amongst the remaining issues of the Durable-Durham Doings in 1919, where articles were more likely to reflect Mrs. Wade than the
Geo. D. Girls. Amongst these writings, though, I suggest workers utilized the newspaper published and circulated by the mill to use literacy to articulate their agency through contradictions in hegemonic narratives that illustrated their resistance to the values we see forwarded by the industry itself. These alternative narratives allow us to begin conceptualizing not only growing worker opposition to the working and living conditions around industrial labor, but also how literacies played a role in articulating this resistance in subtle ways. Using company resources (which may have included literacy learning) to oppose company ideology was likely an act occurring throughout the history of the southern mill industry. But pieces of writing in the DDD explicitly connect literacy skills and literacy events to exhibitions of worker agency; in this way writing as a practice and the circulation of this writing allows workers to construct and share counter-hegemonic narratives that express contradictions – even when small – to mill ideologies.

During a time when companies were investing less economic capital in welfare work programs, employees took on more responsibility for meeting their needs outside of the industry’s immediate leadership. This example of the shifting responsibility of worker welfare to the workers themselves emphasizes workers as individuals, consumers, and agents within the mill, a shift we see reflected in the “Geo. D. Girls” and “Our Foreman.” Companies like the Durham Hosiery Mills hoped that programs to include more worker input in how the industry was run would result in the creation of programs like an employees’ association, suggested in an article published April 15, 1919, in which workers raise money for pensions, insurance, and disability, expenses that either were not covered at all or were covered by the mills in previous decades of the industry. The article states: “it is the unselfish life that counts. We should think as much about what we
can put into an organization of this kind as we think about what we expect to get out of it. All true happiness comes from unselfishness and helping others to enjoy the ordinary things along life’s way” (“Employees’ Association” 1). While welfare workers with the YWCA used similar language describing their work with mill women almost a decade before as they lived “a life of the highest and yet the lowliest service” (“Suggestions” 7-8), we now see this ideology flipped towards mill workers themselves, who are expected to sacrifice for the higher good of the company.

While earlier issues of the newspaper offered more in the line of worker poetry and letters like Mrs. Wade’s and Aunt Matilda’s, as the year 1919 progressed the newspaper’s overall focus transitions from worker submissions to promoting the Durham Hosiery Mills’ movement towards an industrial democracy program. These programs became popular during World War I, though adopted significantly more conservative practices and anti-union sentiments after the War’s end (McCartin 70, 79). Although it is beyond the scope of this project to fully explore this transition, it is significant to recognize that the articles and poems analyzed in this section are set amongst larger conversations of “democracy” as a method for solving labor issues and avoiding unionization within the southern mill industry. This move rhetorically recognized the validity of worker voices in making industry decisions; unfortunately this validity was mostly nominal even as it transitioned some mills from an overtly paternalistic social organization to one in which workers were asked to take more initiative to meet their own needs (McCartin 82-83).

The complexity behind the newspaper’s emphasis on employee voice, even if only nominal, is rooted in its origin as a company-sponsored circular, but becomes more
significant as the paper is situated during a transitional period when mills shifted responsibility for worker wellbeing more to workers themselves, and workers demanded more say in their own working conditions. The *DDD* allows us glimpses of literacy practices from the ground up instead of the top down approach often manifested in these earlier programs, taking as a starting point for analysis the voices of workers and employers in conversation. Although the paper was sponsored by mill administration and not what we might consider a grassroots publication, it does provide an outlet for employees to circulate their writing and through that circulation begin to record a history of their own.

**A Rug for Rosa: Consumer Culture, Community, and the Agency of Choice**

This final section continues to identify how mill women used literacy practices to create and perpetuate moments of agency and resistance through the examination of the 1939 Federal Writers’ Project interview between Ida Moore and the former mill worker, Kate Brumby. As mail order catalogs and magazines circulate through Brumby’s home, I pose we consider the presence of “choice” in consumer culture as an additional site for the intersection of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives. This sense of agency, exhibited, for example, through the processes of selecting goods from a catalog, must be problematized within the larger context of consumer culture and the manipulative nature of the advertising industry during the early twentieth century. Specifically, as Damon-Moore and Kaestle point out, “magazines [and other circulars during the early twentieth century] taught the public the very [consumer] roles that advertising campaigns advocated” (Damon-Moore and Kaestle “Gender, Advertising” 251), reminding us that although women and men might decide to purchase a particular item, their decisions were
riddled with the influence of advertisements produced to convince them of their actions. The search for agency in consumer culture also requires that we consider how consumer culture absorbs more radical social trends to open new markets for commodity consumption and how literacies are used to navigate these new markets (Hennessy Profit 19, 84, 217). Therefore, studying consumer “choice” is a sticky business: even as buyers used literacies to navigate mail order catalogs and magazines as we will see, they were impacted by a variety of pressures that are difficult to access through this oral history. The purpose of the analysis that follows, then, is as much to set up possibilities for further exploration, as it is to provide definitive answers.

As mills decreased their investments in worker welfare, opportunities for workers to participate in consumer culture increased at the same time that printed mail order catalogs and magazines targeted rural women as a new market. Active participation in consumer culture—and how to do so “correctly” without spending a family’s entire income on products—was certainly an aim of earlier welfare work programs in many model mill villages (Long 3-4, see also Thompson 10). Commodity consumption was also associated with building social space and class habitus on the mill hill, as the modified furniture, sewing patterns, and written recipes that made some aspects of a middle-class habitus available to mill women through welfare work programs cultivated consumer desire for store-bought clothes and food bought at the company stores. This move positioned women as household gatekeepers for certain kinds of commodities, reflecting the much larger trends in how gender, class, sexuality, and race were constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My analysis of consumer culture within this space seeks to acknowledge how access to literacy practices
around purchasing commodities limited the kinds of identities available to women while also seeking ways that it may have opened up women’s experience of the social world, considering how literacy events around consumption could be used by women to exert agency and construct community around consumer practices (Damon-Moore and Kaestle *Gender As* 4, Hennessy *Profit* 102-103).

I turn to Moore’s interview because it offers insight into the daily life of Brumby and her neighbors. Reflecting on her life, Brumby, born in 1876, provides the voice of a population of women otherwise inaccessible, even as the reliance on memory and the narration of Moore may color the history presented. This view of the experiences of women and their families living in a North Carolina mill village allows us to consider how communities worked together to meet their needs through consumer practices, as neighbors circulated texts and participated in literacy events together. Brumby’s history suggests this was especially true after the mill industry began to decrease its investments in the welfare of workers, though we may also imagine these practices were likely present throughout the history of mill villages. Thus, while participation in consumer culture presents spaces where women were impacted by hegemonic constructions of identity, the ways in which community members worked together to send orders for products that represented multiple households reinforces the relationships between people to sustain within a neighborhood. These relationships allowed workers to access resources beyond the mill hill.

As we continue to “decod[e] … subversive narratives” when reading the lives of mill women, Mohanty encourages scholars to explore “how history and memory are woven through numerous genres: fictional texts, oral history, and poetry, as well as
testimonial narratives – not just what counts as scholarly or academic (‘real’?) history” (79-80). The positioning as oral histories as a genre that has only more recently gained traction as a source for academic history is worth examining briefly. In particular, to set the stage for this reading it is important to recognize the rhetorical situation around the Federal Writers’ Project as one in which a third party interviewer is conveying her impressions along with the transcript of Brumby’s words. In a brief article examining the use of FWP to reconstruct a history of slavery, Thomas Soapes points out both the potential for inaccuracies in the nationwide program’s recording of the memories of former slaves and the unique value in the interviews collected. These challenges include methodological problems in the selection of participants, the age of participants and the time lapsed between their experiences as slaves and when the interviews were collected, the fact that many interviews include descriptions “which might assist the reader's effort to evaluate the interview,” and the level of comfort that black interviewees felt with white interviewers, among others (33-34). He counters these challenges, though, by stating: “the resolution of these conflicting estimates of the value of the FWP slave narratives as historical sources lies in how historians use them” (Soapes 35). A critical understanding of how we use these kinds of texts and the process of contextualizing them allows scholars to seek the ways these sources provide hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives of history.

With this disclaimer in place, I use Moore’s interview as a sketch of possible functions of literacy within mill homes. In particular, the depiction records brief literacy events around alphabetic texts that provide valuable information about how documents associated with early twentieth-century consumption may have circulated and their
function within some working class homes. I focus here on an episode around the *Larkin Catalog* and *Plan Book*, used to order products through the mail order service. *Larkin* was a popular national circular aimed at influencing the consumption patterns of rural populations as improvements around shipping technologies opened consumer markets beyond the physical locations of stores. The circular started by offering soaps and later a wide range of home goods, which could be sold in larger quantities to a community or individual for incentives ("A Brief History"). In similar ways, other magazines during this time including *Comfort Magazine*, which is also referenced in the history (Moore 158), offered special deals that provided free or discounted items in exchange for subscriptions, rewarding customers for contributing to the major consumer database created by the magazine’s founder (Sayward 29).

These initiatives illustrate some of the methods used by companies to encourage buying habits amongst communities across the US in which members obtained varying levels of alphabetic literacy. Additionally, they appear to work, as Brumby’s neighbor, Rosa, introduces *Larkin* into the home with the expressed goal of getting enough orders from the community to use the incentive program for a rug, telling Brumby and Moore, ‘I’ve got six dollars and a half on [the order] already … I sure hope I can finish it because I’m needin’ the rug bad and I ain’t able to buy one” (154). The use of incentives by Rosa is possible because she is able to pool orders from the community to collect enough capital for the company gift. The incentive price is more expensive in the *Larkin* catalog than the price offered to consumers who organize as official clubs to pool their purchases, and part of reading the catalog includes navigating the different prices listed, which Rosa does for Brumby and her son, Ira. She explains the process to Moore, who asks why
multiple prices are listed: “Well, you see women all over the country form Larkin clubs and order off after things, payin’ cash and not gettin’ a premium. Like if you ordered the hair tonic through a club it would be 30 ¢. But when I’m gettin’ a premium you have to pay the premium price which is 60 ¢. Larkin stuff comes high but it’s awful good” (156). It is also worth noting Rosa’s understanding of Larkin clubs as consisting of women, though we know from Ira’s order that the catalogs include items for men; the role of women as household consumer is embedded in this assumption.

Incentives encouraged increased purchasing (at increased prices) while they also played a significant role in the modernizing of rural homes across the nation through the introduction of appliances and gadgets (Schlereth 365-367, 372-373). While Rosa herself could not complete the necessary order for a rug (or buy the rug for herself), the incentive program provided a motivation for her to share the catalog, moving from one home to the next in her community to collect orders. It is difficult to read this position as counter-hegemonic, but I suggest we do consider it a representation of agency, as Rosa and others in the mill village come together to use literacy within the community to achieve goals and obtain goods. While the village could potentially form the kind of buyers’ club Rosa references, they instead rally their purchases around the accumulation of premiums for community members. Thus we see the circulation of the catalog as a community literacy event as we also see the purchasing of products as moving group members towards specific goals, in this case towards acquiring Rosa’s rug.

The way community members use literacy to connect for a common purpose illustrates the reading the catalog and writing orders for products was an expression of rural literacies. While the mill is a significant agent in Brumby’s life, providing her with
food when she is sick, for example, literacy events take place outside of the factory and in
the context of kinship networks where neighbors sustain by building alliances and relying
on one another. The oral history does not provide information towards the motivation of
village residents in cooperating with Rosa’s drive for acquiring goods, though she does
mention during her visit that her need for the rug was spurred on by her family’s financial
hardship after the extended shutting down of the Grantland Mill, where they presumably
worked (Moore 154-155). The scene echoes lines from the previously explored poem,
“How People Have Seen Us,” to help us consider the possibility of the community
coming together to help a household in need, emphasizing the importance of kinship
networks within the mills and how particular consumer practices may have been
manipulated to support families on the mill hill.

The appliances women like Brumby and Rosa acquired through these catalogs
were instrumental in cutting down the time women spent on housework during the early
twentieth century. In her 1984 reflections, Lydia Evans Beurrier remembers the work her
own mother did in the home in the Erwin Mills Village in West Durham (NC): “Like
most mothers, mine too, never seemed to stop. Besides daily chores, especially in
summer, there was canning, drying fruit, making hominy and sauerkraut, quilting and
much sewing. She somehow managed to add those little women’s touches” (2-3).
Beurrier goes on to state that women in the later decades “are fighting for their rights and
more power to them, but I wonder if they realize it’s modern conveniences that have
liberated them. It’s hard to imagine the modern woman boiling clothes in a wash pot in
the yard, or beating a nine by twelve rug on a clotheslines” (Beurrier 5). The rise of
consumer culture during this time period commoditized needs that tied the population to
wage labor at the same time that it introduced new technologies that made many aspects of life easier, especially for women within the domestic space. Thus, we see literacies functioning as resources through which groups and individuals might meet their needs through the navigation of catalogs, combining words and visual images to extract and even create meaning. Even in families where economic capital was scarce, there was awareness of what kinds of commodities were available on the market.

Although Brumby may not be reading alphabetic text in the Larkin catalog, she and her son browse the pages to find items they want with the help of Rosa, who records their orders; multiple members of the community participate in the event of reading the text and writing down orders for the commodities advertised within the pages of the mailer. In similar ways that Graves and other YWCA welfare workers sponsored learners through the *Cookery Text Book* or the Monaghan Scrapbook, we might think of these catalogs as forwarding very particular ways of conceptualizing the social world. Surrounded by her community and family, Brumby gains access to text as well as consumer capitalism that brought products into the homes of buyers, encouraging her to re-see her surroundings in the colors of the catalog’s rugs.

Community literacy events are associated with the Appalachian region (Puckett), working-class communities (Heath, Finders), and are frequently gendered female (Puckett, Finders), characteristics that describe the presence of the *Larkin Plan Book* in Brumby’s home. Thus, this event provides a glimpse at the ways communities with varying levels of alphabetic literacy continue to circulate texts, learning from each other how to navigate the catalog and meet individual and group needs. The interconnected nature between literacy, community, and consumer desire suggest an intriguing reading
of Donehower, Hogg, and Schell’s concept of rural literacies, which remain tied to the maintenance and subsistence of community. This is especially true in mill villages, where literacy sponsors like the mill owners and welfare workers in the preceding chapters worked to orient neighborhoods around mill-sponsored amenities in part to break down the rural kinship networks rural families carried with them into these spaces. While it is difficult to draw too many conclusions based on this history and the artifacts around it, it is possible that the consumer culture forwarded by texts like the *Larkin* circular created cracks for resistance in the lives of mill women for expressing habitus beyond what was available through company stores. Thus, once again, the complexities of literacies and literacy sponsorship are exposed: while the options available to meet the material and affectual needs of learners may have increased through alphabetic texts, their participation in consumer culture tied them to cash economies and social pressures to comply to hegemonic identity markers.

**Conclusion**

In valuing the sense of agency expressed through the use of literacies in this chapter, I hope to respond to the call in Mohanty from the beginning of this chapter to reconsider the ways women, or any oppressed group, are represented as “victims of the economic process” (23). Women and girls like Mamie Davis, the Geo. D. Girls, and Kate Brumby were certainly exploited by the southern cotton mill industry and very likely bore the brunt of domestic labors in addition to their positions as paid workers. But, as this chapter suggests, they were not merely victims of southern industrialization, but worked to use the resources they built within their communities to meet group and individual needs, sometimes complying with and sometimes speaking against the
expectations of the corporations that surrounded them. To find these moments of resistance, though, we must look beyond the surface of handwritten notes and mail order catalogs to imagine alternative narratives that may speak their power in subtle voices.

This chapter begins to build conversations around how literacies were used by workers for a variety of purposes, both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic within the cotton mill community. My particular interest in presenting these documents has been to identify the intertwining of mainstream ideological positions with resistance within the writing of workers and their families, in an effort to complicate portrayals of the “mountaineer” and the “lint head,” highlighting as well the ways that the intentions of literacy sponsors existed in conversation with those of learners. The attempt to tease out the use of literacy skills to express spaces of tensions, contradictions, opposition, and choice highlight spaces where workers articulated a sense of self, community, and resistance towards mill ideologies and restrictions. This practice allows us to consider how mill women and their families sometimes used the literacies they acquired to challenge the sponsors who supported their learning, transforming venues for the expression of hegemonic ideologies like the *Durable-Durham Doings* into sites where workers could politicize their own voices.
CONCLUSION

Through the examination of literacy sponsorship campaigns that targeted women from the southern Appalachian region in Carolina cotton mill villages between 1880 and 1920, I have attempted to re-orient how these programs are understood in relation to capitalist economies in the United States. Although the field of Literacy Studies, and more generally Composition and Rhetoric, has begun to connect the distribution of literacies to larger economic and social trends (Brandt, Edmondson, Stuckey, Mortensen, among others), my project looks at a concentrated period of time to (re)produce a deeply historicized snapshot of some of the ways literacies were distributed during industrialization in the New South. By trying to maintain a sense of the larger context around welfare work and the literacy campaigns they enveloped, I provide a portrait of literacy sponsorship that begins to unravel the motivations behind groups and individuals who “underwrit[e] occasions of literacy learning and use” (Brandt Literacy 19). This portrait is made particularly clear through the employment of a materialist feminist theoretical lens that allows us to consider how literacies became resources for communities to meet their needs as they were simultaneously deployed as a tool for modernizing the Appalachian mountaineer within company towns. The southern cotton mill village offers a unique moment where corporate funding and social reform came together in very visible ways to address perceived deficits in a population of people through the formation and management of entire villages. It is through this combination that we see both the radical potential of literacy learning to change lifestyles and produce spaces for agency as well as the possibility of literacy distribution to reproduce social
violence through classed, raced, and gendered distribution based on the intentions of literacy sponsors.

Understanding the double-edged nature of mill campaigns contributes to scholarship on literacy sponsorship not only through the inclusion of the voices and motivation of sponsors themselves, but also through the dissection of the multiple layers of sponsorship within these programs. This analysis supports my claim that considering literacy learning an exchange broadens our understanding of its impact on sponsors and learners through an analysis of how all three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—are implicated in educational programs. For example, Chapters 3 and 4 situate how these three forms of capital were created through the labor of teaching and learning alphabetic and social literacies from the perspective of literacy sponsors: as the investment in programs by mill owners and administrators increased efficiency and mill profits, welfare workers gained social capital associated with their positions as reformers and cultural capital that contributed to the refinement of their work. The intertwined nature of literacy learning with the presentation of physical place as socially hierarchal space on the mill hill, illustrates the way literacy learning was further associated with encouraging particular ways of navigating the social world, as workers were encouraged to imagine their lives through mill literacy events including notices with instructions for neighborhood clean-up efforts and the material arrangements of the Secretary’s Cottage from the Monaghan Scrapbook.

The assumptions expressed by sponsors in their discursive representations of mill workers, which regularly conjured images of the southern mountaineer, are significant as they contributed to the ideological justification for welfare work and the mill industry
more generally, both of which were framed as ways to address rural white poverty in the post-Reconstruction South. While these depictions and the social reform campaigns that responded to them emphasized the dependency of workers on the paternalism of the mill industry, a few examples of worker writing suggest that literacy skills were used by workers to create sites for agency in their daily lives. Specifically, examples of worker writing use literacy to create and sustain community outside the structures of mill influence, by producing documents that served to legally verify the age of working members of the household and record family history. Literacy events around the publication of company newspapers and consumer culture were also significant, as workers navigated alphabetic text to rewrite their own identities and participate in consumer culture. This use of literacy formed a space in which workers might advocate for their families, meeting material and affective needs through alphabetic text. In this way, as I show in Chapter 5, mill women and their families used the literacies they likely gained within the mill village to both comply with mill policies, participating in company-run newspapers, for example, and to produce counter-hegemonic narratives to those of the industry, forging documents to gain employment for younger family members or making consumer decisions that expressed the agency of choice.

Reading these chapters together illustrates points of tension between sponsors and learners: as sponsors tried to “extract” characteristics of rural living from mill women and their families through instruction in literacy and other welfare work programs, evidence suggests workers used these literacies to maintain a sense of rural culture through kinship networks. While this claim invites further investigation into the ways working-class homes used literacy during this period, the initial work presented here illustrates the
complexities often obscured in studies of literacy sponsorship. More specifically, my study moves literacy learning from analysis of individual impressions of learners forwarded in ethnographic and other historical works to more broadly position literacy campaigns in social and economic contexts. The focus on sponsors as a way to frame studies of literacy learning, then, contributes increased knowledge of the material and ideological conditions that impact learners and the texts they produce. These studies are enriched by the presence of literacy learners, as Chapter 5 indicates, keeping at the forefront that mill women and their families were not only victims of capitalist progression, but also agents themselves, advocating for their own needs. These voices together produce rich interactions that support the value in studying sponsors and their motivations for literacy distribution as a productive site for historical work. These interactions also emphasize the potential danger in studying solely one side of an interaction, as each stands to portray its partners in static ways that obscure the dynamic nature of navigating the social world.

As part of my mapping of this research-scape, I also employed feminist methodological practices to “[bring] specific attention to various combinations of [research] sites as productive in the search for” valuable artifacts in exploring how these campaigns impacted the lives of women, and to “form and re-form specific patterns of evaluation” in the creation of knowledge (Royster and Kirsch 15-16). In particular, the cultivation of archival accretion through critical imagination and strategic contemplation proved invaluable in the processes of researching mill women as a population underrepresented in archival texts. Patching together a variety of documents addressing literacy learning for women living and working in mill villages during this time period, it
became clear that there was much to gain from the resources I found, though they
required me to consider more deeply the context around how literacy sponsors framed the
learners their programs targeted, as well as how specific aspects of literacy campaigns
implied goals beyond cultivating reading and writing skills.

I hope that my own research methods and methodologies then, provide another
location where my work will encourage researchers to consider not only how our
scholarship adds to a body of knowledge but also how we might build “new paradigms
for how our work itself might be shaped and how we as proponents of it might serve as a
vanguard for knowledge making and knowledge using” (Royster and Kirsch 13-14).
Specifically, these paradigms may:

• Cultivate ways of looking at sources in more creative ways. How can we use
  methods like critical imagination and strategic contemplation to better accrete
  knowledge around missing voices in historical research? As a discipline based on
  alphabetic text, how might we also utilize visual and more tactile “texts” and
  community relationships to reconstruct historical literacies? What methods and
  methodologies are important in the process of using texts produced by sponsors to
  access learners?

• Consider practices that minimize the exploitation of research subjects, whether
  historical or contemporary. How might researchers create more level exchanges
  with the communities and individuals from whom we learn? In what ways might
  we contribute to the sustenance and even enrichment of these communities using
  our own academic training? Particularly in the context of historical work, what
responsibility do researchers have (and might reasonably be expected to honor) to the populations we study beyond ethical representation?

- Address methods and methodologies “to study those with whom we disagree, whose values we don’t share, whose worldviews might be foreign to us” (Royster and Kirsch 76). How do we write about populations who may be both exploitative and radical in their practices? What are ways to reconcile these complexities in how we orient our research, researcher positioning, and representations through writing and teaching?

As we pursue feminist research practices, it is significant that this work goes beyond merely expanding knowledge; it must also interrogate how this knowledge is produced and what is valued in academic work more broadly. The preceding chapters begin to address some of these questions through the (re)creation of knowledge around southern mill populations, though this project is only a beginning.

**Limitations and Directions for Expansion**

In putting together chapters that trace different threads of literacy sponsorship in model southern cotton mill villages, I intended for moments of worker resistance to become even more significant when juxtaposed with the explicit desires of sponsors. This resistance was difficult to access during my research process though, as outlined in Chapter 2, and the scarcity of texts produced by mill women and their families largely accounts for the limitations around this project. The resulting focus on literacy sponsors creates a “top-down” view of literacy sponsorship that is especially present in Chapters 3 and 4. By presenting the interconnected nature of literacy campaigns as incorporating economic and social motivations from sponsors, I attempt to present some of the
complexities of these campaigns, locating the voice of benevolent ideologies and the responsibility of paternalism amongst mill owners like the Parkers, for example. But these complications do not allow a full investigation of the potential for resistance amongst literacy sponsors themselves and only peripherally begin to address how workers used literacies and perhaps even acted as literacy sponsors within these spaces. While I hope that future research will address this scarcity, it is a testament to the paternalism of the southern cotton mill industry’s early years and to the high value historically attributed to the texts of owners of production. It also attests to the time and digging necessary to conduct historical research that investigates counter-hegemonic writings of a people, a place, and a time.

A related limitation is also present in the somewhat flat representations of female reformers in this study. Women associated with teaching welfare work and literacies within cotton mill villages were part of a much larger transition in women’s positions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that located them as fairly radical in their work with working-class and immigrant communities. Although I have attempted to tap into these transitions to better contextualize welfare workers, it is significant to remember that in their work with mill women they represent “simultaneous, interconnected levels” of feminist struggle (Mohanty 64). In this way, as Chapter 5 seeks counter-hegemonic narratives amongst those of hegemony, this lens should also be applied more rigorously to the labor of welfare workers and organizations like the YWCA, which provided opportunities for some women to pursue careers outside of the domestic sphere. The (re)constructions of welfare workers in this project needs to further
complicate the role of female reformers, even as it makes transparent their work within capitalist methods of production.

These limitations begin to map out directions for the expansion of this work, which I see including additional research to extend my analysis and further historicize more radical changes in literacy sponsorship during the 1920’s and 1930’s in the southern mill industry. In documents produced by the YWCA as early as 1918, we see indications of these shifts through recognition that working women were interested in learning about US labor movements and history, not just domestic science. For example, the following is a list of classes suggested in the organization’s 1918 Report from the Industrial Council:

1. Every Day English
2. Cooking
3. Sewing
4. Talks on Art
5. Practical course in History leading up to present war
6. Business efficiency
7. City Government
8. Current Events
9. First Aid
10. Foreign countries
11. Health Talks followed by Health Contest. (“Report” 9)

This list indicates continued value placed on courses in cooking and sewing, but also indicates major changes through the inclusion of classes in history, business, and current events.
Starting with the transition from the explicit presence of mill paternalism to practices in mill management that included industrial democracy after WWI, this research would connect shifts in methods of production, including the “stretch-out system” of mill work introduced in the 1920’s, to changes in worker education programs and literacy sponsorship. With a focus on the YWCA and programs like the Southern Summer School for Industrial Women Workers, I would like to continue to historicize and contextualize more radical approaches to women worker education starting in the 1920's, when my current project leaves off. Historically, this was a time period when southern labor discontents became more visible and public, most notably in the strikes at Elizabethton, TN in 1929 and the General Textile Strikes of 1934. I would like to consider how changes in literacy sponsorship impacted the visibility of labor disputes, making use of the increased presence of archived worker writing and oral histories around this period in southern labor. Calling upon the papers of sponsors and learners, as well as connecting the well-studied time period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the mid-twentieth century, provides a large field to consider how changes in methods of production and changes in literacy sponsorship inform each other.

Finally, in addressing ways for expanding this project, I would like to return to the communities I began working with in North and South Carolina to help them further develop their own archives and historical conservation projects. As outlined in chapter 2, meeting groups and individuals in the Carolinas who were invested in the preservation of mill village heritage had a significant impact, teaching me about the people whom my study strove to access. Even as this project draws to a close, I realize how much more I have to learn about representing historically exploited populations and the value of the
communities that supplemented my often-impersonal archival research, producing knowledge around my artifacts. The willingness of communities and individuals to share their family stories with me added an affectual element to my own research process and made the connection between my work and the descendants of the mill women I hoped to study very clear. This accountability added a sense of urgency in how I represent mill women in this project as it has also encouraged me to think beyond the academy in how my work disseminates and what possibilities exist for future projects. Finally, it was time I enjoyed during the research process, having the opportunity to meet new people and create networks with communities where I shared interests.

It is important to me to continue to cultivate relationships with these communities and individuals in exchange for their support. Additionally, the continuing missions of many of these small heritage centers and individuals to ensure multiple histories of mill workers are important to the feminist praxis I adhere to in my work. While this praxis insists that we adhere to ethical principles through the co-creation of knowledge with the populations we study and represent, working with the Textile Heritage Society in Cooleemee or spending the afternoon with Leon Neal allowed me access to versions of these voices in my work. The material constraints of academic work will certainly impact my ability to continue to grow these relationships at the same time that they may increase the ways I can work with grassroots historical preservation efforts through the possibility of institutional support and service learning projects with students.

One very specific way I might work with organizations is through participation in building and preserving archives and archival resources that seek the voices of southern cotton mill workers. While additional training would be necessary for my participation in
these kinds of preservation projects, this kind of work may be valuable to organizations trying to highlight the multiple paths through mill history, work that often struggles to find funding and institutional support beyond local efforts. My position as an Assistant Professor and the credentials that follow my completion of a PhD program may allow me to use the resulting social and cultural capital to access grants and other funding opportunities, seeking sources for funding to support these small-scale efforts. Lastly, as I begin to construct classroom practices around feminist historiography and the content of my research, I hope to include students in these efforts, who may gain hands-on experiences working with archival and primary sources and exploring how on-site research may impact their work with historical and contemporary studies of language.

This project and its subsequent extensions express my own interests in gender, place, labor, and literacy sponsorship, to consider how these threads intersect in the lives of women. Examining these connections in the historical sites of southern model cotton mill villages and the building of the New South have allowed me to explicitly illustrate the ways that literacies were distributed within these spaces in response to particular constructions of rural whites and with the stated intention of teaching particular ways of living to these populations. Throughout the proceeding chapters, I claim that literacy sponsors provide valuable access for understanding the ways literacy learning campaigns are interconnected with larger economic and social factors, advocating for a deep contextualization and historicization of these educational programs. This stance bolsters earlier claims within the fields of Literacy Studies and Composition and Rhetoric while it also encourages a movement within scholarship to produce studies that recognize the
implications of literacies in both producing sites for agency and reproducing social violence.
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