



Photo by Lewis Hine, November 1908

This photograph of doffers in the Trenton Mills, Gastonia, is one of the photos of the Lewis Hine Gaston County 1908 exhibit.

Our Textile History

A community series exploring Gaston County's early 20th-century textile culture and its influence

Gaston County, 1908 Standing on a Box

In November 1908, sociologist and photographer Lewis Hine - employed by the National Child Labor Committee - visited Gaston County to capture documentary images of children working in local textile mills.



Hine

Hine spent only a few days on that first visit to Gaston County, but he took almost a hundred photographs of children at work in the textile industry and in local mill villages. Those photographs are now part of the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division.

Hine's photographs were never intended to be shared with his subjects and their families. Rather, the thousands of images Hine captured of child laborers in numerous industries throughout the country were used by the National Child Labor Committee to campaign for child labor laws on both state and national levels.

The Standing on a Box ... project commemorates the 100th anniversary of Hine's November 1908 Gaston County photography, takes a look at community life at that time, and asks us to consider how Gaston County's textile history and culture has shaped - and may still shape - the way we live in Gaston County.



counting on grace

— a novel —

ELIZABETH WINTHROP

Gaston Reads a community-wide reading opportunity featuring *Counting on Grace* by award-winning author Elizabeth Winthrop

WHEN: September 2 - November 30

COST: Free community read for adults and students in grades 4 through 12

HOW DOES IT WORK? Youth and adults throughout Gaston County read the book, then discuss it with family, friends, book clubs, classmates, and other readers. Readers may tell about their discussions and activities at library@co.gaston.nc.us, or at www.gastongazette.com/textiles.

FREE COPIES of *Counting on Grace* will be available at all Gaston County Public Library locations, the Gaston County Museum of Art & History in Dallas and *The Gaston Gazette* office, while supplies last. (Please - limit of one copy per household.) Copies of *Counting on Grace* are also available for regular check-out at all Gaston County Public Library locations.

BACKGROUND: *Counting on Grace* is a thoughtful novel about life in an early twentieth-century textile community and the plucky youth determined to build a better future. In 1910 in North Pownal, Vermont, twelve-year-old Grace and her best friend, Arthur must leave school to work as doffers in the mill. Lewis Hine, a reformer with a camera, finds his way into the mill so that he can take pictures of kids like Grace and Arthur next to the enormous spinning frames that beat out the rhythm of their twelve-hour days. Boldly, Grace becomes Hine's secret ally in his efforts to document child labor in American industry.



Winthrop

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, NOV. 8, 2 P.M.

Lewis Hine in Gaston County, 1908 - a 100th anniversary commemoration of Lewis Hine's National Child Labor Committee textile industry photography in Gaston County in November 1908.

- Keynote speaker: Dr. Robert C. Allen - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Descendants of Hine's Gaston County 1908 photographic subjects will be recognized.
- Preview of selected works from the **Standing on a Box** ... photography exhibition.
- Free for adults and students in grades 6 - 12. Auditorium - Gaston County Public Library, 1555 East Garrison Blvd., Gastonia. Refreshments will be served.

SATURDAY, NOV. 8, 5 P.M.

Standing on a Box: Lewis Hine...Gaston County 1908 Photography Exhibition opens at Gaston County Museum of Art & History, located at 131 West Main Street, Dallas.

- Free admission during regular museum hours. For adults and older students. Exhibit will be on view through February 21, 2009.
- Information: 704-868-2164 / Dial 4 or 704-922-7681.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 12, 7 P.M.

Counting on Grace - a reading discussion by author Elizabeth Winthrop. Free event for adults and students in grades 4 - 12. Unity Place, 201 West Franklin Blvd., Gastonia.

- Reception will be hosted by Friends of the Gaston County Public Library.
- Hardback copies of *Counting on Grace* will be available for purchase and author autograph, courtesy of Park Road Books. Ms. Winthrop will autograph only hardbound copies of her books.

SATURDAY, NOV. 15, 2 P.M.

Gaston County 1908: Before / During / After - panel discussion of textile history and culture featuring historians Dr. Roxanne Newton - Mitchell Community College, Dr. James Leloudis - UNC-Chapel Hill, Dr. David Goldfield - UNC-Charlotte, and Dr. Thomas Hanchett - Levine Museum of the New South.

- Free for adults and students in grades 6 - 12. Auditorium - Gaston County Public Library, 1555 East Garrison Boulevard, Gastonia.

FRIDAY, NOV. 21, 7 P.M.

Gastonia 1908: Mill Music and Drama - string band music and dramatic excerpts, featuring Royce Robinson & Friends and Possum Hollar Old Time String Band.

- Free for adults and students in grades 4 - 12. Fellowship Hall - West Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1015 West Franklin Blvd., Gastonia. Information: 704-868-2164 / Dial 4.

The Bolding Family - circa 1960s



The Bolding Family (above) from left to right: Row 1 — James Bolding, Pamela Bolding Jenkins, Sandra Bolding Lane, Thelma Bolding McCarthy, Jeanette Bolding Clark, Jeanette Bolding Welch Row 2 — Michael Bolding and Vickie Bolding Row 3 — Rose Bolding Spicer, Odie Geneva Bolding (mother), Betty Bolding McAteer, Shirley Bolding Adams, David Bolding, Libby Bolding Williams, Clifford Bolding (father) holding Cynthia Bolding Carpenter. Not pictured is Clifford Wayne Bolding.

The Bolding Sisters - circa 2007



Textile memories, a family affair for Bolding sisters

Much of the credit for this story goes to Amy Sifford of Gastonia, who arranged a meeting with her mother, Thelma Bolding McCarthy, and six of her mother's 13 siblings. The *Gazette's* Interactive Editor Kevin Ellis and videographer John Powell sat down with seven of the "Bolding sisters" on July 29 and talked about what it was like working in a textile mill and growing up in the Newtown mill village, which was part of Firestone Mill.



KEVIN ELLIS
Interactive Editor

They told their family story with passion, which in turn offers a glimpse into what Gaston County was like when textiles were king here.

At our Web site, www.gastongazette.com, we have compiled 15 videos from our interview with the sisters, as well as other stories and videos.

This site will expand with more stories and videos as *The Gazette* continues to explore Gaston County's rich textile history.

This special section offers many ways to get involved and experience this history for yourself.

Starting Tuesday, Gaston County Public Library and *The Gaston Gazette* will begin giving away copies of "Counting on Grace." This award-winning novel by Elizabeth Winthrop tells about life in a turn-of-the-century textile community and a young girl determined to build a better future.

The Gazette will offer the community a way to discuss this book on its Web site.

You can reach Kevin Ellis at 704-869-1823.

- To share your memories, please call Interactive Editor Kevin Ellis at 704-869-1823 or e-mail him at kellis@gastongazette.com.
- If you bring in items, please make sure we have a way to get back in touch with you to return them.
- The Gazette* is located at 1893 Remount Road, Gastonia.



Tight-knit in Newtown

The Boldings may have not had much growing up in the Newtown mill village, but they did have parents who cared for them and they did have each other.

Seven of the 14 children of Clifford and Geneva Bolding talked to *The Gazette* about what it was like working in the mills and growing up in a mill village.



Pamela Jenkins, 54, of Dallas is the 13th of 14 children. She gives a firsthand account of what it was like working in the mills at gastongazette.com/textiles.

14 kids

Clifford and Geneva Bolding met working in a textile mill in South Carolina. After they married and started having children, they moved to Gastonia to work. They lived in the Newtown mill village in the shadow of Firestone mill from the 1930s through the 1950s.

The Bolding family would eventually include 14 children.

"My mama had one in her arms, one at her feet and one in her belly all the time," said daughter Pamela Jenkins.

Betty Bolding McAteer talks about how the mill let her mother go after the birth of

her seventh child. "They first started at Firestone Mill. Daddy worked there for years and years and years, and Mama did too."

"But Mama had so many children until finally they told Mama they couldn't let her come back to work after one of her children was born. They said she was costing the insurance company too much for having so many babies."

"My mama had 14, and so Mama said she couldn't promise them that. She didn't know if she was going to have any more or not. So she just went and that's when she went to Parkdale. She retired from Parkdale."

there (Parkdale) for 11 years."

"It was kind of hard at first getting used to it, but after I got used to it I got to where I could keep up with my job good. I took pride in my work. They also said if you do something, do it right to begin with and you won't have to do it again. So that's what I learned when I went to work. You were supposed to do it right so you wouldn't have to go back and do something over again."



Betty Bolding McAteer, 74, of Gastonia is the second oldest of 14 children. She talks about what she learned working in the textile mills at gastongazette.com/textiles.

Betty goes to work

Geneva Bolding told her 14 children not to follow her into the textile mills for work, but most of her children spent at least a little time working in textiles.

Here Betty Bolding McAteer talks about getting her first job and what she learned from it. "I was supposed to be 18, but I lied. I was only 16, but I told them I was 18 so I could go to work. I worked

Our Textile History

The living room of the Dean Street house in Newtown mill village, Clifford and Geneva in the back with children and some grandchildren.



Owing the company store

In addition to the mills providing housing at little cost, many of them had company stores where employees could buy necessities on credit. With 14 children, Clifford Bolding sometimes had to make use of that company benefit.

Pamela Jenkins talks about her father and the company store at the CDA Mill.

"Before he worked at Parkdale and Firestone, he worked at the CDA Mill and that was three mills together."

"There were three separate mills. It was the Clair, the Dunn and the Armstrong. It was just called the CDA Mill."

"They had a community store for all of the employees and if you ran out of anything they could go get it on credit and then they would take it out of your paycheck. Like my Dad would go up there if we needed milk and bread and things like that, he'd get it at the community store and then they would take it out of his weekly paycheck."

"I know he had to go get coal that we heated with and a lot of times he owed more at the store than his paycheck was, trying to feed us all." — Watch a video of Pamela Jenkins talking about buying from the company store at gastongazette.com/textiles.



Libby Williams, 72, of Gastonia is the third of 14 children. Watch a video of her talking about the family's first car at gastongazette.com/textiles.

Simpler times

The Bolding sisters say they didn't have much growing up, but appreciate their upbringing and the values they learned. Their neighbors were not strangers, but part of the extended family.

"Everybody just knew everybody. We would go visit one another. We would go to their homes and visit and they would come visit us," said Betty McAteer.



Shirley Adams, Libby Williams and Rose Marie Spicer in the early 1950s

"We just knew everybody. Everybody gathered around in the neighborhood to play games together and to do things together," McAteer said.

And being part of a family meant helping one another. "I quit school when I was in the 10th grade to go to work to help my daddy and I gave him my check," said Libby Williams, "and I bought the first car that we had with my income tax, which was a '49 Chevrolet. I think it was 200 some dollars if I remember right."



Thelma Bolding McCarthy, 76, of Bessemer City is the oldest of 14 children. She talks about importance of faith online at gastongazette.com/textiles.

Faith

The Bolding sisters say their parents instilled in them a strong faith in God. They went to church and learned to be respectful of others, they said.

"I'm thankful for my upbringing," said Libby Bolding Williams, 72, of Gastonia. "They took us to church when we were little. Church made us appreciate what we do have, because we were poor."

The family attended church together, which continues to hold special meaning for the family.

"We all went to the Beach Avenue Baptist Church when we were little," said Thelma Bolding McCarthy. "The reason

it's so special is because my daddy helped

start that church. When they first started it, this friend of his was the first pastor. Daddy was an assistant who helped him."

"The ceiling was made out of slab piles, what they called slab piles of lumber and the floor was sawdust and that's where they had their first services."

"And my daddy was always active in the church," McCarthy said. "He would take all his children to church. He would line us up on a row and we didn't misbehave because Mama would have a switch in her hand and if we misbehaved Mama would switch us on the leg and we knew to be quiet and reverent in church."

"We respected the Lord's house."

Christmas party

Parkdale Mill would have a big Christmas party each year for the children of employees. Pamela Jenkins talks about why it was such a big deal every year.

"(Parkdale) had a community building and every Christmas they would have a big Christmas party for the employees' kids."

"And we would go and we would watch a movie, a Christmas movie, and they would give us a bag of fruit, with nuts and things."

"And, we looked forward to that, going over there to watch that movie. That was something."

"They had a Santa that passed out the toys. Each child got their own individual toy and then everybody got a bag of fruit and nuts. "It was something different. It was, where my parents worked and that was the big deal. It was, 'Oh boy, we get to go to where my parents work to go to the party. It was a big deal to us that they put on this little party for the children of the employees.' — Watch a video of Pamela Jenkins talking about the mill Christmas party at gastongazette.com/textiles.

Fun in the Mill Village

Children in the mill village often had to rely on themselves or make do to have fun. Most of the fun took place outdoors.

"We had fun playing. We mostly made our own fun. We didn't have toys or nothing, but we played like we did," said Betty McAteer.

"We played games like kick the can and red Rover, red Rover," added Pamela Jenkins.

"One of the games I remember was jump the plank," said Rose Spicer, 66, of Kings Mountain. "You would put a brick down and then a big ol' long plank."

"And somebody would get on one end and jump and (the other) person would go up high. That was fun. That was fun."

Other games included the double jump rope or Double Dutch as it was called.

The Bolding children also had a favorite place to go skating. "We would go up to the Beach Avenue Church because the church was up on a big hill. We would make homemade skateboards and that was our skating rink," Pamela Jenkins said.

"The neighborhood kids would meet up there and we would just skate."

The sisters would not buy their skateboards at stores, but rather make them.

"We would take a piece of wood, just an old piece of wood, part of a 2 by 4, and we would take a skate apart. The old metal skates where you had to have a key to tighten up and we would put the front wheels on the front of the skate board and the back wheels on the back of the skate board," Jenkins said.

The Firestone mill had the advantage of not only having a clubhouse, but also a pool. Both would be the center of the community.

"Now some of the neighborhood kids could go to it (the pool), but they would have to pay like a nickel. But the children of the employees that worked there we didn't have to pay anything. We could go swimming and play in the clubhouse," Jenkins said. "My daddy used to go all the time. He would go up there and play checkers," Jenkins said.

ON THE WEB

Words and photographs tell part of the story of what it was like for the Bolding sisters growing up in the Newtown village in the shadow of Firestone mill.

But if you visit our Web site you can hear their story in their own words through a video of the interview we did with them.

We also have grouped together other stories, along with more photographs and videos at "Our Textile History" located on our Web site.

This project will be ongoing through at least the end of the year, and with your help it will continue to grow.

Also on our Web site we have published the photographs Lewis Hine took in 1908 of Gaston County children working in local mills.

We also hope that readers of the novel "Counting on Grace" turn part of our Web site into a communitywide book club. *The Gazette* and Gaston County Public Library begin giving away copies of the book Tuesday.

If you have any suggestions or ideas to carry this project forward, please contact Interactive Editor Kevin Ellis at 704-869-1823 or e-mail me at kellis@gastongazette.com.

— Kevin Ellis



Vickie Welch working

Vickie Bolding Welch started working in textiles when she was 18, and at 57 still works at the American & Efird plant on York Street in Gastonia.

"When I first started my daddy got me the job. I was 18 years old. He got me a job working at Parkdale, that one over there on Garrison, working in the card room, running off bobbins. I done that and I swept the floor. Then I wanted to change, I wanted to make a little bit more money. I wanted to learn how to spin, because that's what my Mama had done. So I went out into the spinning room and I learned how to spin, and I've started spinning ever since."



Vickie Welch, 57, of Lincolnton is the 10th of 14 children. She talks about the ups and downs of work in a textile mill at gastongazette.com/textiles and she still enjoys the work. She describes what she does at her job now.

"I run twisters. The new kind of twisters that they got out now. It's a big, ol' long shoe and you have to set the yarn in the pots and when you set the yarn in the pots you have to thread it up. You have to use the threader and put it on a bobbin and when you put them on a bobbin and have them all wrapped up, you push a button and start it up."

"They're all supposed to be running and if one breaks back you have to cut them off and fix it and start it back up."

The plant where she works makes yarn for shoes and heavy-duty clothes like blue jeans, she said.

Lewis Hine's National Child Labor Committee Photography



Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 -1940), photographer, sociologist and humanist, is best known for his portraits of immigrants at Ellis Island and his unflinching views of housing and labor conditions in the United States. Studying and eventually teaching at the Ethical Culture School in New York City, Hine infused his humanist concerns into a style of documentary photography that set the standard for delivering a social message through his medium.

Hine began documenting immigrants at Ellis Island around 1904. He explored the immigrant experience with his probing lens and exposed the terrible housing and working conditions they experienced in

attempting to integrate American society.

Believing in the power of photography to persuade authorities to enact better housing codes for tenements and labor laws protecting children, Hine approached social welfare agencies about using his images for reform campaigns.

Hine eventually became a staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, travelling across much of the southern and eastern states to document the working conditions of factories, fields, mines, mills and canneries which made use of child labor.

The results of Hine's photographic pursuits eventually led to the establishment of child labor and safety laws for all workers.



Samples of Hine's exhibit with comments in his own words



No. 266. Spinners in Melville Mfg. Co., Cherryville, N.C.



Oldest girl, Minnie Carpenter, House 53 Loray Mill, Gastonia, N.C. Spinner. Makes fifty cents a day of 10 hours. Works four sides. Younger girl works irregularly.



A few of the girls going home from Loray mill, Gastonia, N.C. Many others younger.



Trenton Mill, Gastonia, N.C. Tom Jenkins (left hand end) 13 years old, been in mill 3 year. Walter Jenkins, 15 years old. 4 years in mill. John Glover, (right hand) 16 years old, at mill 5 years. Closing hour, 3 p.m. Saturday, November.



Rush Merrill, Loray Mill, Gastonia, N.C. 12 years old. Been in mill 3 years Doffer. Gets 75 cents a day. Said sometimes gets 3 to 5 hours a day resting between times.



Cherryville Mfg. Co., Cherryville, N.C. One of the smallest boys. Doffer.

Lewis Hine photos courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Our Textile History A community series exploring Gaston County's early 20th-century textile culture and its influence

This project has been made possible by funding from the North Carolina Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the North Carolina Arts Council, an agency funded by the State of North Carolina and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art. Support has also been provided by Preservation North Carolina, Friends of the Gaston County Public Library, Gaston County Museum of Art & History, Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission, Gaston County Public Library, Gaston Arts Council, and community volunteers.

Presented by: Gaston County Public Library, Gaston County Museum of Art & History, Preservation North Carolina, Gaston Arts Council, Friends of the Gaston County Public Library, Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission, Levine Museum of the New South and *The Gaston Gazette*.

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