

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State Historic Preservation Office

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Roy Cooper
Secretary Susi H. Hamilton

Office of Archives and History
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

June 29, 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: Shelby Reap
Office of Human Environment
NCDOT Division of Highways

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley *Renee Gledhill-Earley*
Environmental Review Coordinator

SUBJECT: Historic Structures Survey Report, Widen NC 7 to Multi Lanes from I-85 to
US 29/US 74, U-3608, PA 17-12-0021, U-3608, Gaston County, ER 18-1309

Thank you for your June 7, 2018, letter concerning the above-referenced undertaking. We have reviewed the materials submitted and offer the following comments.

We concur that the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village (GS0348) is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for industry and community development and Criterion C for architecture. The compact and cohesive mill village is a late and rare surviving example of the mill villages that emerged with the booming textile industry of Gaston County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The village was built to house workers for the Belmont Fabric Company, which was reorganized as the South Fork Manufacturing Company in the 1930s. Initially constructed in 1926, with later housing added during WWII, the village displays bungalow-inspired house designs that illustrated new trends in Piedmont mill house architecture after WWI. Of the 50 homes in the district, 39 mill houses remain and contribute to the district. Overall it has the requisite integrity to convey its historical significance.

The boundaries may need some adjustment along the north and south ends of the district. North of the district, there are houses on Cross Street that may be associated with the mill village. Tax parcel data suggests they may be the same age as several of the houses within the proposed district. Further research should be completed to see whether they have historic associations with the mill. Along the south end, boundaries should be drawn to include the parcels south of 203 Live Oak Avenue and 207 Live Oak Avenue. They appear to have been historically associated with the parcels directly to the north and share owners. The boundary along Live Oak Avenue to the south should extend beyond the south edge of the parcels to the curb along the road.

The above comments are offered in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the regulations of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation at 36 CFR 800, If you have any questions concerning them, please contact me at 919-807-6579 or renee.gledhill-earley@ncdcr.gov

Please use the above assigned tracking number for any correspondence or questions concerning this undertaking. Failure to do so may cause delays in our response. We appreciate your time and consideration.

cc: Mary Pope Furr, NCDOT, mfurr@ncdot.gov

Received: 06/12/2018
State Historic Preservation Office



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

JAMES H. TROGDON, III
SECRETARY

ER 18-1309

Renee Gledhill-Earley
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
4617 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4617

June 7, 2018

Due -- 7/5/18

Dear Ms. Gledhill-Earley:

H- 2 R6 letters -
6/25/18
JHC

RE: Historic Structure Survey Report, TIP# U-3608, PA# 17-12-0021, Widen NC 7 to multi-lanes from I-85 to US 29/US 74 in Gaston County

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to Widen NC 7 to multi-lanes from I-85 to US 29/ US 74 in Gaston County. Mattson, Alexander, and Associates prepared the attached Eligibility Report and recommends the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village (GS0348) eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The report and survey materials are enclosed for your review and comment per 36CFR.800. Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding this project. I can be reached at (919) 707-6088 or by email at sreap@ncdot.gov.

Sincerely,

Shelby Reap

Shelby Reap
Historic Architecture Section

Attachment

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1020 BIRCH RIDGE RD
RALEIGH NC 27610

HISTORIC STRUCTURES SURVEY REPORT

**WIDEN NC 7 TO MULTI-LANES FROM I-85 TO US 29/74
GASTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**TIP No. U-3608
WBS No. 50135.3.1
Limited Services Contract No. 7000016411**

Prepared by:

**Frances Alexander, Project Manager
Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc.
2228 Winter Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28205**

Prepared for:

**North Carolina Department of Transportation
Environmental Analysis Unit
Raleigh, North Carolina**

May 22, 2018

HISTORIC STRUCTURES SURVEY REPORT

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May 22, 2018

MATTSON, ALEXANDER AND ASSOCIATES, INC.

Frances P. Alexander

May 22, 2018

Frances P. Alexander, M.A.

Date

Richard L. Mattson, Ph.D.

Date

North Carolina Department of Transportation

Date

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is widening NC 7 to multiple lanes from I-85 to US 29/74 in Gaston County. This project is subject to review under the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA/USFS 2015). An NCDOT architectural historian defined an area of potential effects (APE) and conducted a site visit to identify and assess all resources of approximately fifty years of age or more within the APE. Only one resource warranted an intensive National Register eligibility evaluation, and it is the subject of this report. NCDOT architectural historians determined that all other properties and districts were not worthy of further study and evaluation due to a lack of historical significance and/or integrity. The project location is depicted in **Figure 1**, and the APE is shown in **Figure 2**.

This architectural resources investigation consisted of background research into the historical and architectural development of the textile mill village and a field survey of the resource. The field investigation was undertaken in March 2018. The resource was originally surveyed as the Belmont Fabric Company Mill Village during a 1979 county-wide inventory. The intensive-level evaluation contained within this report recommends the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village for National Register eligibility (**Table 1**).

The northern boundary of the APE terminates just north of the Belmont Abbey College campus, roughly parallel to the Oaks Parkway. The western boundary of the APE follows Fairway and Forest drives and Peachtree and Lambert streets to its southern terminus roughly 1,000 feet south of the Wilkinson Boulevard/North Main Street intersection. From this point, the APE turns east to cut through the former Sacred Heart College campus before turning north to cross over I-85 and through the Belmont Abbey College property to its northern terminus.

Table 1

Property Name	PIN	Survey Site Number	Eligibility Recommendation	Criteria
Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village	N/A	GS0348	Eligible	A and C

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I. INTRODUCTION

This eligibility report was prepared in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) project entitled, *Widen NC 7 to Multi-lanes from I-85 to US 29/74*. The TIP No. is U-3608, and the WBS No. is 50135.3.1. As shown in **Figure 1**, the project is located in Gaston County.

The northern terminus of the APE lies just north of the Belmont Abbey College campus, roughly parallel to the Oaks Parkway. The western boundary of the APE follows Fairway and Forest drives and Peachtree and Lambert streets to its southern terminus roughly 1,000 feet south of the Wilkinson Boulevard/North Main Street intersection. From this point, the APE turns east to cut through the former Sacred Heart College campus before turning north to cross over I-85 and through the Belmont Abbey College property to its northern boundary. The APE encompassed only one resource—the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village (GS0348)—that warranted intensive-level investigation (**Table 1**). Originally surveyed as the Belmont Fabric Company Mill Village during a 1979 county-wide inventory, the resource is shown on the APE map (**Figure 2**).

This investigation was conducted to evaluate the mill village for National Register eligibility. The current evaluation of eligibility report is part of the environmental studies undertaken by NCDOT and is on file at NCDOT, Raleigh, North Carolina. This documentation complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (36 CFR 800), the National Register criteria set forth in 36 CFR 61, and NCDOT's current *Historic Architecture Group Procedures and Work Products*. The report also complies with the *Report Standards for Historic Structure Survey Reports/Determinations of Eligibility/Section 106/110 Compliance Reports in North Carolina* established by the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (HPO). Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of federally funded, licensed, or permitted projects on properties listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places and to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office a reasonable opportunity to comment.

The eligibility evaluation consisted of research into the history and architecture of the mill village and a field investigation of the resource. For the research phase, the principal investigators examined both primary and secondary sources which included deeds, National Register nominations, the HPO survey files for Gaston County, aerial maps, and two publications, *The Architectural Heritage of Gaston County, North Carolina (1982)*, by Kim Withers Brengle and *The Textile Heritage of Gaston County, N.C.: 1848-2000 (2001)*, authored by Robert Allison Ragan. In developing the architectural context for this project, the principal investigators also conducted a windshield survey in and around Belmont and Gastonia to identify other textile mill villages comparable to the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village.

Field work took place in March 2018. The mill village, including the houses, landscape features, and layout of the village, was examined and documented with photographs to assess the current level of integrity. The current tax parcels for the houses within the mill village are shown on the site plan included in the evaluation (**Figure 6**).

Figure 1
Project Location Map

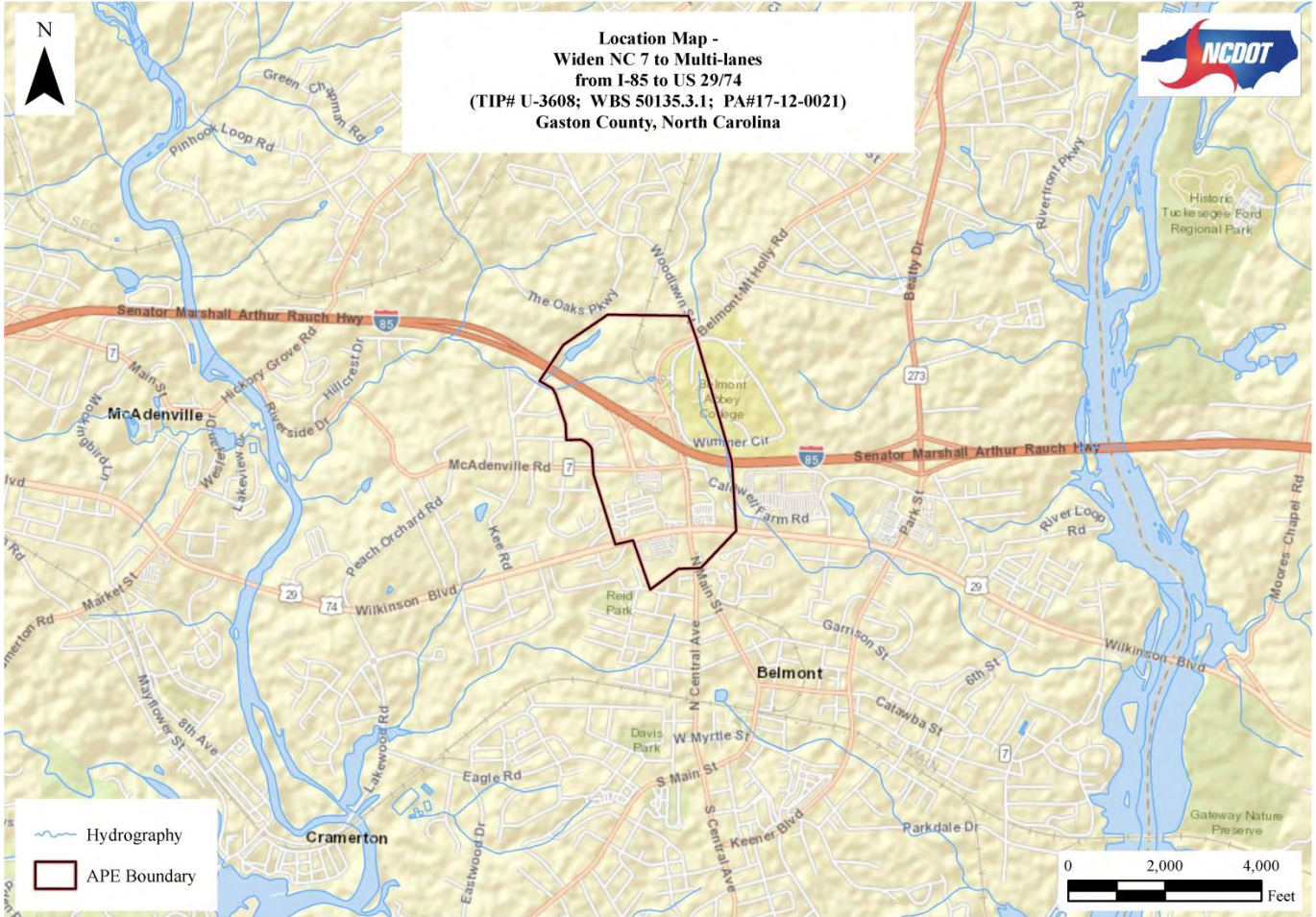


Figure 2
Area of Potential Effects (APE) Map



II. PROPERTY EVALUATION OF ELIGIBILITY

Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village (GS0348)

Rankin, Hand, Ford, Cross, and Lambert Streets,
and Live Oak Avenue
Belmont, Gaston County

Dates of Construction: 1926; ca. 1940
Eligibility Recommendation: Eligible



Physical Description

This compact former textile mill village is comprised of fifty frame houses situated within a grid of tree-shaded streets adjacent to the site of the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company mill. The 1926 mill, which faced Wilkinson Boulevard south of the village, was razed in 2006, and the site now contains a block-long, red-brick shopping center. A landscaped berm clearly separates the shopping center parking lot from the mill village. The village, which was established with the mill in 1926, has two principal streets (Rankin Street and Live Oak Avenue) that parallel each other and extend east to west. There are also two shorter cross streets (Ford, Cross, and Lambert streets). Probably just before or during World War II, east-west Hand Street was constructed to divide the western block of the village in half and provide several additional house lots. Mature oak trees line the streets. The houses, most of which are one story tall, sit close to the streets with small front yards and more commodious rear yards.

According to the 1929 Sanborn map of Belmont, the village contained thirty-seven mill houses, twenty-eight of which survive. Approximately twenty additional residences were constructed around World War II, mainly on open lots around the periphery, and eleven still stand. Most of the 1926 mill houses have matching one-story, square forms with four-room plans. Slightly larger, one and one-half story models—probably erected for mill supervisors—stand at the corners of several blocks. Inspired by the national popularity of bungalows, the 1926 houses are well constructed and display a variety of low-pitched, front-gable, side-gable, hip-roofed, and clipped-gable roofs with broad eaves. The front porches are either off-set or span the facades. These houses feature raised, brick foundations, and some stand on slightly elevated sites. The World War II-era dwellings are mainly one-story, gable-roofed, frame duplexes. Four examples line Ford Street along the eastern boundary while others are interspersed throughout the village.

In 1992, the village was platted as the South Fork Crossing, and the former mill houses were sold. With the divestiture of the village, existing houses were remodeled, and some new residences were constructed. In common with the vast majority of the mill houses that survive in Belmont and Gaston County, these dwellings now have replacement siding, window sash, porch posts, and railings. However, most retain their original forms, roof and porch configurations, and fenestration. Also, weatherboarding appears to survive underneath the new vinyl siding. A few of the houses display original exposed knee brackets under the eaves and brick porch pedestals.

Eleven additional frame dwellings have been added to the village since 1992. They are located primarily on the west side where new houses have replaced some existing dwellings on Rankin and

Lambert streets. Although new, the modern houses, with their one-story to one and one-half story forms, side-gable or front-gable roofs, and frame construction, are generally consistent in size, scale, form, set-back, and materials with the surrounding mill houses. A row of three newly constructed dwellings marks the east entrance to South Fork Crossing along Elm Tree Lane, but this area was historically outside the limits of the mill village.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, Looking Northwest Towards Live Oak Avenue From Modern Parking Lot (Original Mill Site).



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 100 Block of Live Oak Avenue, Looking Northwest From Modern Berm.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 100 Block of Live Oak Avenue, Looking West From Intersection with Ford Street.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 100 Block of Live Oak Avenue, Looking East.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 116 Live Oak Avenue, Looking North.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 110-108 Live Oak Avenue, Looking North.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 1940s Duplex, 203 Live Oak Avenue, Looking South.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, Rankin Street, Looking East From Cross Street.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 100 Block of Rankin Street, Looking West From Ford Street.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, Supervisor's House, 101 Rankin Street, Looking South.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 103-105 Rankin Street, Looking Southwest.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 117 Rankin Street, Looking South.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 115-117 Rankin Street, Looking Southwest.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 1940s Duplexes, 100 Block of Ford Street, Looking Northeast From Live Oak Avenue.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, Modern Houses, 200 Block of Rankin Street, Looking East From Lambert Street.



Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, Modern House, 104 Lambert Street, Looking South.



Modern Houses in the 500 Block of Elm Tree Lane, Outside the Mill Village to the Southeast, Looking North.

Historical Background

The Belmont Fabric Company was incorporated in 1925 by Belmont textile leader, Abel Caleb Lineberger, and two other investors, brothers H.A. Rhyne (manager) and D.E. Rhyne. Starting with a capital of \$75,000 and 200 looms, the mill opened in 1926, producing cotton goods from waste yarn purchased from other Belmont mills. Just north of the mill, the company erected a small mill village containing thirty-seven frame dwellings for its operatives (**Figure 3**). The Belmont Fabric Company was one of the last mills in Gaston County to include company-owned houses for workers. Increasingly through the 1920s and into the 1930s, new plants—many of them smaller hosiery and other specialty mills—employed workers who commuted to the mills by automobile. In addition to this new mobility, the intense competition among mills after World War I, the changing relationship between owners and employees, and New Deal child labor legislation all compelled mill owners to reexamine their operating costs, including the mill village system and the imperative of housing entire families (Ragan 2001: 257-258; Sanborn Map Company 1929, 1938).

The Belmont Fabric Company was strategically sited along Wilkinson Boulevard, completed in 1926 as a section of US 74 and North Carolina's first four-lane paved highway. The newly surfaced and widened highway linked the mill to the regional railroad hub and emerging banking center of Charlotte to the east. The Belmont Fabric Company was also located along the Belmont spur of the Piedmont and Northern Railway (GS1625) (DOE 2010), a thriving interurban line that connected Charlotte with the textile city of Gastonia, twenty-three miles to the west. This intersection of the interurban railway and the highway attracted other factories as well, and in 1928, Lineberger teamed up with J.M. Hatch and B.M. Armfield to open the Hatch Full-Fashioned Hosiery Mill beside the Belmont Fabric Company plant on Wilkinson Boulevard. The Hatch mill, which still stands, was built without a mill village (Ragan 2001: 253-254; Brengle 1982: 258; HPO File; Sanborn Map Company 1929, 1938).

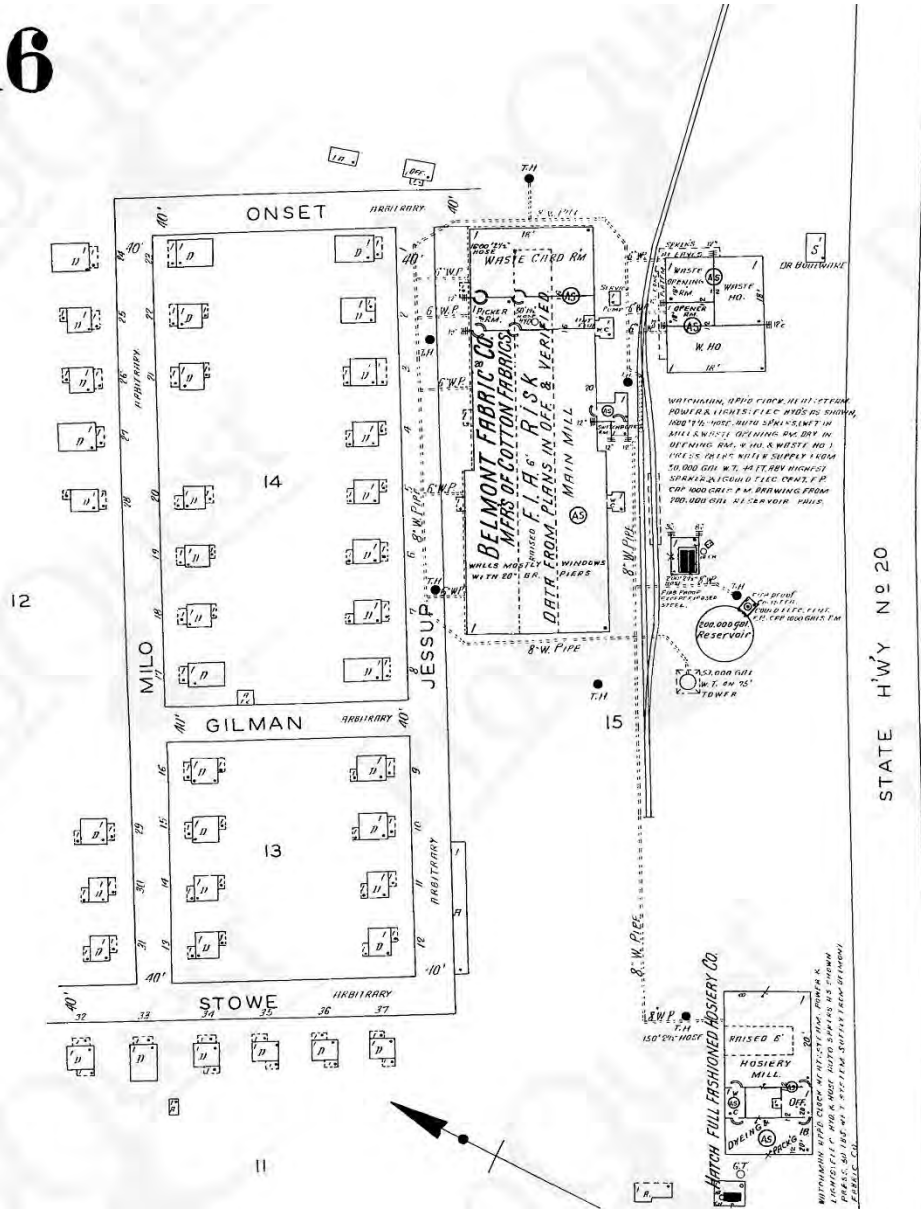
Despite its locational advantages, the Belmont Fabric Company was not successful, and in 1931, the company and its assets were sold at public auction. The new owner was the powerful Stowe-Lineberger partnership, a consortium of the two most influential textile families in Gaston County. Between 1905 and 1931, the textile business partnership of Abel C. Lineberger, Robert Lee Stowe, and Samuel Pinckney Stowe controlled twenty-one textile mills in Belmont or its environs, elevating Belmont and Gaston County to the pinnacle of textile production in the country. With Lineberger as mill president and DeLambert Stowe as secretary and manager, the new ownership reorganized the plant as the South Fork Manufacturing Company and authorized capital stock of \$250,000. South Fork Manufacturing Company eventually included 11,904 spindles to weave high quality, combed cotton yarns, the signature product of Gaston County mills. The company also continued to own the mill village, adding new frame duplexes for workers around the time of World War II (**Figures 4-5**). Employees of the mill continued to inhabit the mill village through the ownership of South Fork Manufacturing (Ragan 2001: 255-256; HPO File; Belmont City Directories 1960-1980).

In 1986, the mill and mill village were purchased by R.L. Stowe Mills, Inc., which shortly thereafter closed the mill, and in 1992, the company began renovating the mill village and selling individual houses. Stowe Mills named the updated village, South Fork Crossing, and built additional dwellings among the newly remodeled mill houses. In the mid-1990s, the mill itself was renovated and sold to Parkdale Mills, Inc. of Gastonia which demolished the facility in 2006 (Gaston County Plat Book 47: 81; Ragan 2001: 256).

Figure 3

Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village
1929 Sanborn Map

16



Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1929.

Figure 4

Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 1938



Source: Gaston County Tax Department, 1938 Aerial Map.

Figure 5

Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, 1951



Source: Gaston County Tax Department, 1951 Aerial Map.

National Register Criteria Evaluation

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village is recommended **eligible** for National Register under Criterion A for industry and Criterion C for architecture. The period of significance extends from 1926, when the mill village was constructed, to 1968, the fifty-year guideline for National Register eligibility. Throughout this period, the textile mill (now gone) was in operation, and the village remained under the ownership of the South Fork Manufacturing Company and inhabited by mill employees. Although the South Fork Manufacturing Company continued to own the mill and mill village until 1986, when sold to R.L. Stowe Mills, Inc., the mill village does not have the exceptional significance required under Criteria Consideration G to extend the period of significance to within the last fifty years.

Integrity

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village retains the most of the aspects of integrity needed for National Register eligibility. The mill village has integrity of location, feeling, and association. Although the mill no longer survives, the mill village, with its original grid of streets lined with houses, occupies its original location and remains oriented to the site of the mill as well as to the Piedmont and Northern Railway line (GS1625) (Determination of Eligibility 2010) and Wilkinson Boulevard. The village remains a clearly defined and cohesive community with its original layout of streets shaded by mature oak trees and limited access to the village via Main Street or Wilkinson Boulevard. The mill village also possesses sufficient integrity of design and workmanship to convey its significance under Criteria A and C. Although the mill houses have undergone some remodeling in recent years, the village retains its scale, architectural rhythm, and streetscapes while the houses retain their original designs, forms, and construction. Despite the replacement sidings, the frame construction of the houses is evident, and the one-story and one and one-half story houses retain their rectangular forms, roof and porch configurations, and fenestration.

Criterion A

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village is recommended **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion A (Event). To be eligible under Criterion A, the property must retain integrity and must be associated with a specific event marking an important moment in American prehistory or history or a pattern of events or historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, a state, or a nation. Furthermore, the property must have existed at the time and be documented to be associated with the events. Finally, the property's specific association must be important as well (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15: 12*).

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village has significance under Criterion A for industry and community development and planning. Constructed in 1926, the village is a late and rare surviving example of the mill villages that emerged with the booming textile industry in Gaston County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, the mill village is a particularly cohesive example of these communities. Its limits are well defined and essentially unchanged since the small expansion of the village during World War II. The village contains well-constructed houses with consciously varied forms, and the dwellings were typically set on raised, brick foundations and occasionally on elevated sites. This compact

village also illustrates progressive trends in mill village planning that emerged during World War I and came into fruition in the 1920s.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Gaston County emerged as a center for cotton manufacturing as neighboring Charlotte and the surrounding Piedmont became the largest textile manufacturing region in the world. Advances in steam technology followed by the rise of electrical power freed mills from their earlier dependence on riverside locations and allowed the mills to operate more efficiently by locating along railroad lines. Gastonia and nearby towns—especially Belmont—were well situated for the burgeoning textile industry of the twentieth century. Through their strategic connections to the great Southern Railway system, the towns, and their mills, all had access to national markets. By 1914, these towns were also positioned along the local Piedmont and Northern Railway (P&N), an electric interurban line built by the powerful Southern Power and Utilities Company of Charlotte. Twenty-three miles long, the P&N connected Gastonia to Charlotte—with a spur line to Belmont—and provided shipping and receiving to the numerous mills along its route (Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2010: 26-27; Fetters and Swanson 1974: 43-47).

World War I was a boon to the textile industry. The military had myriad uses for textiles, and the soaring demand for cloth which began before World War I drove regional textile production into the 1920s. By 1920, Gaston County had more cotton mills than any other county in the country, and these mills produced eighty percent of the country's fine combed yarn. Gastonia, which alone boasted thirty mills in 1920, was proudly known as the "City of Spindles" and the "Combed Yarn Capital of the World". During this period, smaller mills began to merge into larger conglomerates, and by 1925, four major textile firms controlled half the mills in the county. The November 1923 *Southern Textile Bulletin* featured profiles of several of the most influential firms in Gaston County, including the Lineberger-Stowe group which controlled the mills around Belmont (Cope and Wellmann 1977: 72-73; Puett 1939: 185; North Carolina Bureau of Labor and Printing 1920: 108-110; Hobbs 1920: 6; Brengle 1982: 15-16; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2010: 38).

During these years of expansion and reorganization, Belmont emerged as a focal point for textile production. In 1901, Samuel Pickney Stowe and Robert Lee Stowe, who had profited from investments in a Gastonia mill, partnered with Abel Caleb Lineberger to found Chronicle Mills in Belmont. The partnership subsequently opened Imperial Mill in Belmont in 1907 and the nearby Majestic Mill in 1908. Many more mills followed. In 1919-1920, the Lineberger-Stowe group built four large textile plants—Acme, Linford, Perfection, and Stowe—along the P&N just north of town which created a vibrant textile mill community of mills, churches, stores, schools, and company-owned villages known as North Belmont. In 1931, the Belmont Fabric Company was sold at auction to the Lineberger-Stowe group which controlled twenty-one mills and their mill villages around Belmont (Ragan 2001: 231-256; Bishir and Southern 2003: 54-55; Martin and Woodard 2002: 5-9).

Mill villages played an essential role in the development of the Piedmont textile industry. Cotton mill companies established these villages to house the waves of new factory workers pouring into the mills from mountain farms. Adapting the model of New England textile mills, the mill owners erected communities of simple, look-alike, frame dwellings adjacent to the factories. By the 1920s in Gaston County, brick mills with tall water towers and adjacent streets of standardized worker houses created a distinctive industrial landscape along the railroad lines. In 1930, sociologist Jennings J. Rhyne described a characteristic Piedmont industrial scene:

The observer approaches what appears in the distance to be a town of considerable size when suddenly around the bend in road or over the hill he comes upon compact rows of small houses of more or less similar architectural design. They run in rows on either side of a street, then branch out into sideways on hill or level. He is impressed already with the large, brick structure that seems to stand in the center of things. Standing beside the structure at an elevation of perhaps 100 to 150 feet is a circular steel tank painted black on which is written, "Southern Cotton Mills" (Rhyne 1930: n.p).

By World War I, some mill owners had begun employing professional landscape designers, notably Charlotte's Earle Sumner Draper, to create model villages to attract workers. The most progressive of such villages featured not only well-built, white-washed houses—often four-room bungalows—with electricity and plumbing but also consciously winding streets, tree-shaded medians, elevated house sites, paved sidewalks, and modern recreational and social facilities. Draper is known to have laid out the villages for Arkray Mills (GS0987) and Ruby Mills (GS0560) in Gastonia and probably planned or influenced the designs of others across the county (Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2001: Section 8, page 27; Hall et al. 1987: 115-118; Glass 1992: 63-65; Bishir and Southern 2003: 54-55; 484-487; Crawford 1995: 189-194).

Draper's plans were not always fully realized, and amenities varied widely in the different villages. The social reality of mill villages through the early twentieth century was complex, and company services were also accompanied by tight ownership controls. Textile companies frequently donated land and money for churches and schools and provided some common pasture and garden spaces. As Southern mill workers usually came from farms, opportunities to garden and raise chickens not only supplemented wages but also eased the transition from farm to factory. For example, the village owned by Loray Cotton Mill in Gastonia included churches, a community center, playgrounds, a day care facility, and a swimming pool. House lots in villages could be large enough for kitchen gardens and some livestock (Hall et al. 1987: 119, 148-150; Glass 1992: 70; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2001: Section 8, pages 40-41).

As the 1920s progressed, new mills, such as the 1926 Belmont Fabric Company, tended to be smaller and more specialized, filling specific niches in the textile market. Their owners erected correspondingly compact villages or ceased building villages altogether. By the late 1920s, Belmont's Lineberger-Stowe group began investing in smaller plants for manufacturing hosiery and sewing thread or for dyeing and processing packaged yarns. None of these new operations included villages for employees (Ragan 2001: 233, 251-256).

Beginning in the 1930s and particularly after World War II, textile companies began selling or demolishing their mill houses or just razing the villages altogether. This divestiture or demolition occurred for many reasons, including the mounting cost of housing improvements, particularly in an intensely competitive industry, an increasingly mobile workforce, and the changing relationship between ownership and labor. However, employment levels remained relatively steady during the 1950s and early 1960s, and some textile companies continued to own mill villages populated by mill workers. For instance, the South Fork Manufacturing Company retained ownership of the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village until its sale in 1986 (Hall et al. 1987: 148-150; Belmont City Directories 1960-1980).

By the late twentieth century, growing foreign competition and automation in the textile industry led to sharp declines in both the number of textile mills and the number of employees. Between

1982 and 1985 alone, over 10,000 North Carolina textile workers lost their jobs when sixty-seven plants permanently shut down. However, reflecting the historical dominance of textile manufacturing in Gaston County, a quarter of the work force (18,700 employees) was still involved in textiles during the early 1990s. The decline continued, and by the early 2000s, the industry employed just eleven percent of workers (www.bizjournals.com/GastonCountyTextilesHangingByAThread,2002. Accessed 9 March 2018).

Although many cotton mills and mill villages throughout Gaston County have been demolished in recent decades, a small number of substantially intact villages remain. These communities, like the Belmont Fabric village, retain cohesive collections of worker houses that have been remodeled with replacement siding, porch posts, and window sash but that retain their forms, porch configurations, and patterns of distribution. Original layouts and architectural rhythms persist, characterized by rows of look-alike dwellings uninterrupted by widespread demolition or new construction. In Gastonia, the impressive Loray Mill Historic District (National Register 2001, Boundary Increase 2006) contains blocks of worker housing erected between 1901 and the 1920s surrounded by the massive, five-story Loray Mill which is newly renovated. The Arlington Mill Village (GS0400) (Determination of Eligibility 1996) and the Modena Cotton Mills and Mill Village Historic District (GS0539) (Determination of Eligibility 2017) both contain rare surviving collections of mill houses from the turn of the twentieth century. On the west side of Gastonia, the 1918 Myrtle Cotton Mill Village (GS0404) (Determination of Eligibility 1996) illustrates the mill villages of the World War I era, featuring several streets of identical, pyramidal-roofed cottages with engaged porches. With its tree-shaded streets of look-alike hip-roofed housing, the 1919-1924 Groves Mills and Mill Village Historic District (GS0512, GS0513) (Determination of Eligibility 2017) on the east side of Gastonia also clearly illustrates the mill villages constructed in this period (HPO Files; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2017: 59-114; 135-160; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2001).



Arlington Mill Village, ca. 1900, School Avenue, Gastonia, Looking West.



Myrtle Cotton Mill Village, 1918, Myrtle Avenue, Gastonia, Looking West.



Myrtle Cotton Mill Village, 1918, Ross Street, Gastonia, Looking East.



Groves Mill Village, 1919-1924, Pear Street, Gastonia, Looking South.



Groves Mill Village, 1919-1924, Apple Street, Gastonia, Looking North.

As with Gastonia, Belmont now has few mill villages that remain cohesive and substantially intact. Although cotton mills and villages were built in Belmont and its environs throughout the early twentieth century, just a few villages survive with extant original layouts and house types. In addition to the 1926 Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village, only the villages of the 1919 Crescent Spinning Company (GS0352) and the 1920 Stowe Spinning Company (GS0333) still have much of their integrity. Constructed shortly after World War I, both retain blocks of identical, hip-roofed worker housing as well as larger bungalows for the mill supervisors. Although these dwellings have been typically remodeled with modern siding, windows, and porch posts, they continue to display key elements of form, size, and scale and original patterns of distribution and architectural rhythms. Located on the east side of Belmont, the Crescent Spinning Company village is concentrated around Sixth, Church, and Catawba streets. The Crescent mill has been demolished. The Stowe Spinning Company village is located in North Belmont. In its heyday, mill housing associated with the Stowe Spinning Company as well as with the Acme, Perfection, and Linford mills filled this industrial community. The Acme mill and village have been razed, and though Perfection and Linford mills still stand, only small portions of their original villages remain. By contrast, the Stowe Spinning Company village features rows of hip-roofed cottages along Belmont Avenue and Woodlawn, Boundary, and Jackson streets as well as a few stylish bungalows for supervisors. Several nearby stores and churches along Woodlawn Street served all the North Belmont villages. The Stowe textile mill, too, remains extant but like other successful Gaston County mills was greatly expanded during the middle and latter decades of the twentieth century (Ragan 2001: 235, 243-249).



Crescent Spinning Company Mill Village, 1919, Church Street, Belmont, Looking West.



Crescent Spinning Company Mill Village, 1919, Sixth Street, Belmont, Looking North.



Crescent Spinning Company Mill Village, 1919, Sixth Street, Belmont, Looking South.



Stowe Spinning Company Mill Village, 1920, Jackson Street, Belmont, Looking North.



Stowe Spinning Company Mill Village, 1920, Jackson Street, Belmont, Looking South.



Stowe Spinning Company Mill Village, 1920, Woodlawn Street at Belmont Avenue, Belmont, Looking West.

Criterion B

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village is **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion B (Person). For a property to be eligible for significance under Criterion B, it must retain integrity and 1) be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, i.e. individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, state, or national historic context; 2) be normally associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he/she achieved significance; and 3) should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions. Furthermore, the mill village is not eligible if its only justification is that it was owned or used by a person who is or was a member of an identifiable profession, class, or social or ethnic group (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15: 14*).

The property is not eligible under Criterion B because the house is not associated with individuals whose activities were demonstrably important within a local, state, or national historic context.

Criterion C

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village is recommended **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion C (design/construction). For a property to be eligible under this criterion, it must retain integrity and either 1) embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; 2) represent the work of a master; 3) possess high artistic value; or 4) represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15: 17*).

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village neatly displays the bungalow-inspired house designs that illustrated new trends in Piedmont mill house architecture after World War I. When first built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Piedmont mill villages contained worker houses that conformed to a limited repertoire of familiar traditional forms. Into the 1910s, mill villages in Gaston County tended to encompass rows of standardized, side-gable, triple-A, or L-plan dwellings. Many of these forms and plans were the house types promoted by Charlotte mill engineer, Daniel Augustus Tompkins, in his influential 1899 publication, *Cotton Mill: Commercial Features* (Hall et al. 1987: 115-118; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 2001: 27; Glass 1978: 138-149; Glass 1992: 41; Bishir and Southern 2003: 54-55; Crawford 1995: 188-189).

By World War I, new mill villages were characterized by houses with hip or pyramidal roofs, often with such bungalow-inspired traits as engaged porches, dormers, clipped gables, and exposed rafters under deep eaves. They also marked a new era of mill-house construction. Houses were equipped with electricity, hot water heaters, screened windows, and bathrooms connected to sewers. Most villages of this period continued to include rows of identical housing, but by the 1920s trends in village planning encouraged a mix of up-to-date architectural designs to counteract the stigma attached to identifiable mill housing. Some mill owners hired professional designers, notably the prolific Earle Sumner Draper of Charlotte, to renovate existing villages or to construct entirely new communities for their employees. While Draper did not design houses, he favored the nationally popular bungalow. Although bungalow mill houses were often uniform in their square shapes and generic four-room plans, simple variations in roof types, porch configurations, and paint color offered architectural diversity and broke the monotony of standardized mill housing (*Mill News*, 14 October 1920; Crawford 1995: 192).

The designs of four-room bungalows and larger supervisors' dwellings in the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village may have been selected from one of many mail order building catalogs. These catalogs exerted their influence nationwide—including in the Piedmont mill villages—throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Enterprising firms such as "Quick-Bilt Bungalows" of Charleston, South Carolina, advertised their designs in such popular trade journals as *Southern Textile Bulletin*. The firm marketed "attractive homes" for "industrial villages" that with all the necessary fixtures and dress lumber could be sent by rail directly to mill sites where the houses could be assembled easily (*Southern Textile Bulletin*, 15 January 1920).

Although remodeled in recent years, the mill houses retain their original bungalow-inspired forms, floor plans, scale, set-backs, fenestration, and porch configurations. Furthermore, the variations in roof types and porch designs remain vivid and illustrate 1920s design trends as companies sought to break the uniform look of worker housing.

Criterion D

The Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village is recommended **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion D (potential to yield information). For a property to be eligible under Criterion D, it must meet two requirements: 1) the property must have, or have had, information to contribute to our understanding of human history or prehistory; and 2) the information must be considered important (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15*: 21).

The property is not eligible under Criterion D because it is not likely to yield any new information pertaining to the history of building design or technology.

National Register Boundary Description and Justification

The proposed National Register boundary for the Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village has been drawn according to the guidelines of National Register Bulletin 21, *Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties*.

The proposed boundary encompasses the layout of streets and thirty-nine mill houses historically associated with the mill village. Within this boundary are Live Oak Avenue, Ford, Rankin, Rikard, Lambert, Hand, and Cross streets, and Center Lane, along which are houses or duplexes built either in 1926 during the original construction of the village or during a ca. World War II expansion. All the 1926 and World War II-era mill houses and duplexes are contributing resources. The proposed boundary also encompasses eleven modern dwellings contained within the original village plat that are surrounded by historic mill houses. These modern dwellings are noncontributing resources but are similar to size, scale, form, materials, and architectural styling to the historic dwellings. As shown on **Figure 6**, the proposed National Register boundary is defined by tax parcels. Along Live Oak Avenue, the tax parcels also define the right-of-way.

Figure 6

**Belmont Fabric Company-South Fork Manufacturing Company Mill Village
Site Plan and Proposed National Register Boundary**



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