



# A Thread In Time

Newsletter of the National Society of Descendants of  
Textile Workers of America, Inc.

[www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com)

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## President's Message

The 2017 annual meeting of the National Society of the Descendants of Textile Workers of America, Inc. is scheduled for 1:00 pm Sunday, March 19th at the Grill 37, 37 Putnam Street (Route 44) Pomfret, CT. Brunch will be available. All members are invited to attend. We are looking into having future meetings on-line so more members will be able to attend.

Our society has agreed to host the event in 2018, the 250th anniversary of Samuel Slater's birth. A committee was formed at our annual meeting to work on this project. Mary Brown and Ann Sheedy have volunteered to work on the committee to create an agenda, select a site, and help organize the event. Please contact me if you are interested in assisting.

To help cover the expenses of hosting the Massing of the Colors, our Treasurer has opened an account to accept donations designated for the event. Please send your charitable donations with your annual dues to NSDTWA, c/o Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370.

We have been printing a series on different mills in our newsletter, one of our members, Nancy Saunders of Gastonia, NC, suggested an article on the Loray Mill strike of 1929 (see page 2). For more information, I recommend you google "Loray Mill Strike".

Please contact me if you would like a mill in your area highlighted in one of our issues.

I would like to welcome our newest members. Please contact me if you have suggestions to improve our society. Also, if you have information to share on your ancestors, please submit it to our webmaster for inclusion on our website.

*Best Regards,  
Bill Warner*



Loray Mill Gastonia, NC. 1929  
Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org

"The Mill Mother's Lament"  
by Ella Mae Wiggins (recorded  
by Pete Seeger)

We leave our homes in the morning,  
We kiss our children good-bye,  
While we slave for the bosses,  
Our children scream and cry.

And when we draw our money,  
Our grocery bills to pay,  
Not a cent to spend for clothing,  
Not a cent to lay away.

And on that very evening  
Our little son will say:  
"I need some shoes, Mother,  
And so does Sister May."

How it grieves the heart of a mother,  
You everyone must know.  
But we can't buy for our children,  
Our wages are too low.

It is for our little children,  
That seems to us so dear,  
But for us nor them, dear workers,  
The bosses do not care.  
But understand, all workers,  
Our union they do fear.  
Let's stand together, workers,  
And have a union here.

## New Members

We welcome our newest members to the society.

#68 - Michael Prince; Abita Springs, LA

#69 - Carlotta Farris; Carmichael, CA

# Loray Mill Gastonia, NC

## The Loray Strike - Spring 1929

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In the 1800's most mills were situated along rivers in New England to utilize water power to drive the equipment in the mill. With the advent of the steam engine, factories were able to locate where water power was unavailable. Built in 1900-01 and opened in 1902, the Loray Mill in Gastonia, NC was one of the largest and most costly textile facilities in the region. By 1905, nearly 60,000 spindles were used in the mill — nearly three times the number in the next largest mill in Gaston County.

The mill was designed and built by Lockwood Greene Engineers of Boston, one of the leading textile mill engineering firms in the country, and incorporated state-of-the-art design and construction principles. The mill's 2,500 horsepower steam engine was one of the largest in the region. The mill was originally designed to produce cotton sheeting.

Lockwood Greene also designed the surrounding mill village, which was planned for 400 houses. In the early 1900s, tens of thousands of families were drawn from subsistence farming into "public work" in the Gaston County mills from the mountains and foothills of North and South Carolina and Tennessee between 1890 and the 1920s. The Loray management hired agents to recruit mountain families to relocate to Gastonia to work in the mill.

The town of Gastonia swelled from 236 in 1877 to 30,000 in 1930, primarily from the influx of mountaineers exchanging their exhausted land for jobs in the new factories. Although blacks made up 15 per cent of the population of the county, few were allowed to work in the mills.

The Loray Mill, at 600,000 square feet, was Gastonia's largest, was also the first in the county to be owned and operated by Northerners seeking the benefits of a "poor white" labor pool. In 1926, a southern textile worker earned an average of \$15.81 for a 55-hour week compared to the \$21.49 for a 48-hour week earned by his or her New England counterpart.

The mill was very profitable, producing cotton sheeting for international sale, particularly the China market. An increase in demand for cottons goods during World War I propelled a further expansion of textile industry in Gaston County in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Gaston County had more cotton mills than any other county in the US, and most of the county's 50,000 inhabitants earned their living from textiles.

Declining profitability by 1927 led mill management to institute new work policies recommended by the consulting company Barnes Textile Service, reducing the overall workforce and increasing workloads for retained employees. By 1928 the number of employees at the Loray had been cut from 3500 to 2200 while overall output remained the same.

The "stretch out," as the new regime was called, contributed significantly to labor unrest at the mill. In the spring of 1929, the National Textile Workers Union, affiliated with the US Communist Party, targeted the Loray Mill for union organization. An April 1, 1929 strike closed the mill for several days. The National Guard was deployed by the governor (a mill owner himself), and the mill reopened. In May, strikers were evicted from their mill-owned houses in the village, some of whom created a tent colony a few blocks from the mill. On June 7, 1929, the police chief and deputies were called to the union headquarters in the tent village. Shots were exchanged, and Chief Orville Aderholt was fatally wounded. Sixteen union organizers and strikers were initially arrested and charged with murder.

In the aftermath, 71 strikers were arrested. Eight strikers and another eight members of the NTWU, were indicted for the murder of Chief Alderholt. During the trial, a juror went insane after seeing some disturbing evidence. As a result, the judge was forced to declare a mistrial. When news of the mistrial was released, a general wave of terror ran through the countryside, with the anti-strike "Committee of One Hundred" prominent in the vigilante activity. During the early part of September, mobs of men gathered up strikers and ran them out of the county. These actions came to a head when, on September 14, a truck containing 22 strikers was chased down and fired upon. One female striker, a local union sympathizer and writer and performer of strike songs, Ella May Wiggins, was shot and killed. No one was ever convicted of her murder.

In a retrial in the Alderholt case, seven men were charged with his murder, six of whom were Loray Mill employees. All were found guilty of second degree murder and sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment by Judge M.V. Barnhill.

Overall the strike was not a success, but during the same time period there was a series of other textile strikes throughout the South. The main objective of these strikes was the abolition of the stretch-out, and some met with a measure of success. The success was difficult to come by, though, as strikers were branded by the press as "radicals," and labor organizers as "foreign agitators." "Wherever a strike broke out, state troops were immediately sent and to this show of force were added police, deputy sheriffs, and vigilantes. Over time, this spontaneous uprising of textile workers in the South allowed for the formation of the United Textile Workers, the "first significant breach in southern anti-unionism."

The text for this article is taken from OurState.com [digitalinnovation.unc.edu](http://digitalinnovation.unc.edu) and Wikipedia.com.

### **Scholarship**

A goal of our Society is to provide scholarships to Vocational School students. The scholarship does not have to be used for college. It can be for licensing fees, tools, etc. The student must meet the following criteria:

1. Exemplary work ethic
2. Respect for self, family, peers, and authority
3. Strong background and interest in American History
4. Good academic performance
5. Attendance record indicates no suspensions or unexcused absences

### **Website**

Once again, I invite you to visit our outstanding website at [www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com). Our newsletters are available on the website in full color. You will also notice that some of the honor roll members have special attachments with anecdotes about their life. You are welcome to submit material about your ancestor. Please contact Bill Warner at [wwarner13@gmail.com](mailto:wwarner13@gmail.com) or Mary Brown at [mbrown06239@gmail.com](mailto:mbrown06239@gmail.com) for submission of this material.

### **Treasurers Report**

Checking Account	\$1,594.46
Savings Account	\$2,582.23
Life Member Endowment Fund	\$2,642.41
Total as of December 31, 2015	\$6,819.10



### **Insignia**

You may order our insignia pin for \$40, our mini insignia for \$30, our charm for \$30 or the life membership pin for \$10 (available to Life Members only). Send a check, including \$5 for shipping and handling, made out to NSDTWA to Ms. Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370. Insignia is always available at the annual meeting. All proceeds from the sale of insignia are placed in the scholarship fund.

### **Officers**

President	William A. Warner <a href="mailto:wwarner13@gmail.com">wwarner13@gmail.com</a>
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Loray Mill Protestors Gastonia, NC. 1929  
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