

Coleman Manufacturing Company ^[1]

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Coleman Manufacturing Co., Concord, N.C.

by Bruce E. Baker, 2006Image courtesy of Library of Congress.

^[2]

The Coleman Manufacturing Company in Concord was the first black-owned cotton mill in the United States. Warren C. Coleman ^[3]^[3] was born a slave in Cabarrus County ^[4] on 25 Mar. 1849. At the age of 18, only a few years after the abolition of slavery, he began a career as a merchant and businessman, investing early in real estate ^[5] in Concord. By the 1890s, Coleman was the wealthiest African American ^[6] in North Carolina. He turned his attention toward establishing a cotton mill that would break the color line that kept blacks from enjoying the economic benefits of mill employment. Beginning in 1896, Coleman lined up financing for the enterprise, and in February 1897 he announced the project to the public at the Cabarrus County Courthouse ^[7].

The cornerstone of the mill was laid on 8 Feb. 1898. Coleman had difficulty securing adequate capital, however, and the completion of the mill was delayed. Coleman Manufacturing finally began production in June 1901, but in 1902 the entire textile industry took a downturn, and the effects were felt severely by Coleman's fledgling enterprise. Further difficulties in 1903 led Coleman to resign his position as director in December of that year. Three months later, on 31 Mar. 1904, he died in Concord. The next month, Durham financier Benjamin N. Duke ^[8] foreclosed on a \$10,000 mortgage he held on the mill. He sold the property to Concord textile magnate James William Cannon ^[9] in March 1906. The structure of the Coleman Manufacturing Company was operated for many years afterward as Cannon Plant Number Nine.

References:

Allen E. Burgess, "Tar Heel Blacks and the New South Dream: The Coleman Manufacturing Company, 1896-1904" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1977).

Jordan K. Rouse, *The Noble Experiment of Warren C. Coleman* (1972).

Ernie Wood, "Ex-Slave Is One of Many Who Are Lost to History," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 Mar. 1975.

Additional Resources:

Library of Congress image of Board of Directors: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001705780/> ^[10]

NC Historical Marker, Warren Coleman: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=L-91%20-%20WARREN%20COLEMAN%201849-1904> ^[3]

Act to incorporate Coleman Manufacturing Company, NCDCCR Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/private-laws-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-of-...1897/1955878?item=2086204> ^[11]

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Textile industry ^[17]

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Origin - location:

Concord ^[19]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. ^[20]

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