

Spray Water Power and Land Company ^[1]

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by Lindley S. Butler, 2006



"Advertising card for Spray Water, Power & Land Co." Image courtesy of Rockingham Community College Foundation, Inc., Historical Collections, Gerald B. James Library.

^[2]The Spray Water Power and Land Company, established in 1889 by James Turner Morehead ^[3], was a hydroelectric power, textile, and land development company that created the Spray industrial complex on the Smith River in the present-day town of Eden. Its antecedent had been a textile firm created by James Barnett and John Motley Morehead ^[4] (James Turner Morehead's father and later a governor of North Carolina). The firm of Barnett and Morehead had operated a variety of mills, a cotton gin, a blacksmith shop, and a general store.

After the formation of the power and land development company, James Turner Morehead turned its operation over to his son-in-law, B. Frank Mebane ^[5], and a nephew, W. R. Walker, so that he could then devote his time to more challenging chemical and metal alloy experimentation. The Morehead family interests were now under the direction of Mebane and Walker, who secured northern capital for embarking on a long-range comprehensive textile development of the power resources. Beginning with Spray Cotton Mills in 1896, several mills were built in rapid succession: Nantucket (1898), American Warehouse (1899), Lily (1900), Spray Woolen and Morehead (1902), Rhode Island (1903), and German-American in Draper (1906). All of these mills remained in the company except Spray Cotton Mills, which was sold in 1897 to Karl von Ruck, whose relatives, the Bishoprics, developed the mill into a successful family-owned business during the twentieth century. The Spray corporation-which included three mills, Spray Cotton and Nova Yarns in Eden and a plant at Mt. Holly-maintained an industry-wide reputation for customer satisfaction and high-quality yarns. The company announced its closing in 2001 after 105 years of operation.

Although later divested of its textile interests and waterpower rights, the Spray Water Power and Land Company, still under the ownership and management of Morehead descendants, retained large tracts of land that have continued to be developed.

Reference:

James E. Gardner, *Eden: Past and Present, 1880-1980* (1982).

Additional Resources:

Spray Cotton Mills Development Opportunity: <http://www.spraycotton.com/> ^[6]

An act to incorporate Spray Water Power and Land Company [p. 850], General Assembly, Department of Cultural Resources Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/laws-and-resolutions-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-1891/3968946> ^[7]

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Authors:

Butler, Lindley S. [11]

Origin - location:

Rockingham County [12]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.[13]

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