

Background and History

Today, the Greenville-Pickens area in the South Carolina upcountry boasts a diversified economy that continues to take advantage of the area's ideal location between Atlanta and Charlotte. From its roots as a trading post with the Cherokee tribe, the region has overcome the hardships of war, the growing pains of industry, and the civil unrest of the emerging South. The upcountry we know today remains a textile and manufacturing hub of the South, but it is now serviced by world class education institutions, innovative health care solutions, and a diverse transportation system.

From Cherokee Lands to Railroad Towns

The upcountry has a rich Native American history in which the local Cherokee and Catawba tribes relied on the diverse landscape of thick canebrake, virgin forests, and large prairies to hunt buffalo, elk, deer, turkey, and bear. The protected grounds of the Cherokee nation were off limits to settlers except for a small number of families, and very few settlers lived within the boundaries prior to the end of the French and Indian War. The first permanent settlement in the upcountry area occurred around 1770, when Richard Pearis settled the falls of the Reedy River.

This 1770 settlement followed the founding of Charles Town in 1670, at a time when the British traded amiably with the Native Americans for many years. During the American Revolution, the Cherokee tribe even sided with the British. In the years following the Revolution, however, relationships suffered due to concern over boundaries and the American occupation of tribal lands. Following numerous skirmishes with settlers, the Cherokee nation ceded the territory that would become the Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS) area to the State of South Carolina by signing the Treaty of DeWitt's Corner in 1777.

The American Revolution left the state on the brink of bankruptcy. As a result, South Carolina initiated the sale of vacant land owned by the state to raise funds and increase the state's tax base. The people who purchased the land and inhabited the area petitioned for a new county to prevent annexation by Spartanburg and Lauren Counties. The approximately 795 square miles that make up Greenville County formed in 1786 following the ratification of a bill by the state.

The agricultural society of Greenville County and the surrounding area was established soon after settlement. But the upcountry never competed with the lowcountry in the cotton market. Even after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, most local farmers grew wheat, corn, and sweet potatoes and raised cattle and hogs. Still, agriculture remained the area's main source of employment.

Early Transportation

Earliest travel routes between farms and plantations were based on a network of paths first created by wildlife and later used by Native Americans. The earliest paths included White Horse Road and Buncombe Road, west and north of the City of Greenville respectively. Today, SC Route 11 and Interstate 85 follow the approximate route of Native American paths.

Transportation in Greenville County and the surrounding area began to improve in the late 18th Century. The "wagon road over the Western Mountains" opened in 1797 and provided a link between Greenville County and Green River Cove, and eventually Asheville, NC. Completed just a few years later in 1800, the Santee Canal connected the Santee and Cooper Rivers and provided a way for upcountry produce to make its way to Charleston.

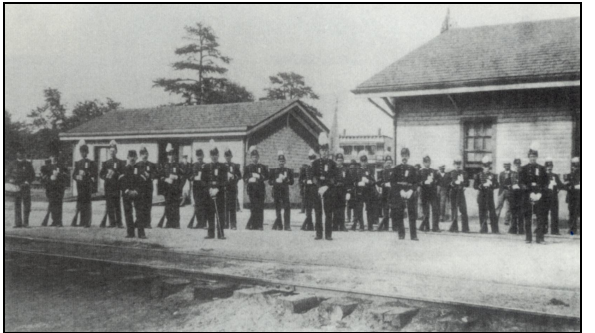
These improvements and a flurry of road and canal construction between 1817 and 1829 focused on bringing trade from Greenville and points west to the port city now called Charleston. But from a historical standpoint, road and canal construction was overshadowed by the arrival of the railroad. The Greenville and Columbia Railroad began operation in 1853. In the decades following its arrival, the railroad improved trade, increased the value of goods, and justified the construction of new public buildings such as a courthouse, a post office, and college buildings.

Industry, Education, and the Civil War

The textile industry expanded following the improved transportation network, the increased production during the War of 1812, and the arrival of northerners experienced with producing textiles. Attracted by the flowing streams and plentiful cotton, New Englanders arrived in the Spartanburg area in 1816 before moving into other parts of the upcountry. Thomas Hutchings is credited with opening one of the earliest mills, a 144-spindle mill on the banks of the Enoree River that began operation in April 1820. The maturation of the textile industry gave rise to new villages inhabited by mill workers, and farmers and textile workers soon frequented general stores throughout the region.

The area that would become the City of Greenville has long been the commercial hub of the upcountry. The roots of commerce for present-day Greenville are traced to a store operated by Richard Harrison in the late 18th Century near the Great Cane Brake on the Reedy River. A second store in the county operated by Alexander McBeth opened prior to January 1794. These stores began operation at a time of rapid population growth following the rush to settle former Indian land.

Higher education arrived in the GPATS area in the 19th century. Furman University was founded in 1826, followed by the Greenville Female College in 1855 and the



Railroad Depot



Early road construction

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859. The state established Clemson College as an all-male military college in 1889 after Thomas Clemson willed his plantation for the establishment of a college to teach scientific agriculture and the mechanical arts.

As men of all ages marched off to fight in the Civil War, industry and business in the area were forced to change focus. The area's textile mills began to produce clothing and other items for the war. Faculty from Furman University — closed during the war — found employment in the mills and other ways to contribute to the war effort. Likewise, women formed groups such as the Greenville Ladies Association in Aid of the Volunteers of the Confederate Army to provide linen and clothing as well as hospital aid to the sick and wounded. During this time, many women also took control of managing the family farms left behind by soldiers.

Reconstruction and Growth

When the war ended, the upcountry and places throughout the South faced many obstacles. Among the post-war concerns was restructuring the economy following the abolishment of slavery. The local economy faced shifts from subsistence to commercial agriculture and from agriculture to industrial production. The freeing of slaves marked the beginning of racial tension that would follow the area and the south into the mid-20th century.

After the Civil War, agriculture in the upcountry transitioned from growing grain and subsistence crops to yielding cotton. From 1865 to 1890, the number of bales of cotton produced in Greenville County alone increased from 1,864 to 28,482. The increase in production required additional labor at a time when population growth was stagnant and the working-class population was declining as freedmen left the area. The focus on cotton production also gave rise to small general stores throughout the county in order to accommodate the needs of the laborer as well as to sell the resulting textiles. This reestablished the town of Greenville as the commercial center of the upcountry.

In terms of transportation, the Civil War left the Greenville and Columbia Railroad in physical and economic shambles, eventually leading to its bankruptcy in 1872. The post-war period, however, included this line's recovery, as well as construction of new lines. An important railroad line connecting Atlanta to Charlotte by way of Greenville opened in 1873. Within a few years, rail cars traveling through the upcountry reached Richmond to the north and New Orleans to the south. In 1886, rail cars began travel on the Laurens and Greenville Railroad between Greenville, Asheville, and points northwest.

This newly established network of railroads was critical to the development of towns throughout the region. The town of Greer incorporated in 1875 after William Shumate purchased a 200-acre farm from Manning Greer and laid out lots around a railroad station. General stores, doctor offices, and a school soon followed. Similarly, Fountain

Inn started as a stagecoach stop but grew when lots were sold following the establishment of a railroad station in 1884. Simpsonville grew following the arrival of the railroad in 1886 and the opening of the Simpsonville Cotton Mill in 1907, and Travelers Rest began as a collection of stores and taverns offering relief to weary travelers along what is now US Highway 25.

Mauldin and Easley owe their founding — and names — to railroads. Originally known as Butler's Crossroads, Mauldin grew from a settlement on twenty-one lots near the proposed railroad depot and changed its name to honor William Mauldin, president of the railroad from 1881 to 1885. The community of Easley was named for General William King Easley, a prominent railroad attorney who helped draw up the railroad route connecting Atlanta and Charlotte. The City of Easley grew around a station on that line.

Growth, Automobiles, and World Wars

As mentioned previously, the Greenville-Pickens area recovered from the war in a manner similar to other areas throughout the South: by shifting from agriculture to manufacturing. This shift increased the mill worker population by encouraging farmers to flock to the mills for the promise of modest wages. Towns grew, including Greenville, which increased in population from 1,518 in 1860 to 11,857 in 1900. The growing city attracted new buildings, a streetcar system, and professional services such as banking, newspapers, and cultural resources. Pickens County's first modern cotton mill was established in 1895. By 1900, the county was home to a pair of railroads, three cotton mills, and two banks. The region's other mill towns grew, and it was during this time that the region's roots in health care and education began to take hold.

Even with the growth of towns and cities throughout the region, the GPATS area at the turn of the 20th century remained rural. Declining agriculture prices and the growth of big business in the textile industry, however, ushered in the Industrial Revolution. This era was dominated by the rise of Benjamin Tillman, who parlayed the support of backcountry whites into a successful election as governor in 1890. His legacy included expanding agricultural education with the opening of Clemson College and Winthrop College, regulating the railroad system and companies, and advocating racism. His legacy of segregation survived in the upcountry and throughout South Carolina for more than 50 years.

The mills prospered in spite of Governor Tillman's bias support of farmers. The typical turn-of-the-century mill village offered workers a place of employment, as well as rental housing and a general store. Education and religion were provided in the villages. As the Tillman era gave way to Progressivism and World War I, the area



Main Street Greenville, 1923

around the urban centers grew outward to accommodate economic and population growth.

The Greenville City Plan and the Automobile

The area's growth also led to the birth of city planning, the widespread use of trolleys, and the introduction of automobiles. Greenville's 1907 city plan, *Beautifying and Improving Greenville, South Carolina*, showed that city leaders were being more attentive to the transportation and aesthetic needs of the city. The plan proposed boulevards, gateways, and public art, as well as a park along the Reedy River.

In 1904, there were five automobiles in the city of Greenville. After an automobile race through city streets in April 1909, the City Council adopted a speed limit of 15 miles an hour. By 1914, the number of automobiles in Greenville County totaled 1,038. This multiplication of automobiles compelled the state to improve the roadways. Existing roads were improved or, as in the case of Old Buncombe Road to Asheville, replaced completely. Private toll roads were converted to free, state-owned roads. The regional road network began to take shape with the August 11, 1917 opening of the Greenville-Hendersonville Highway. Just one year later, two national highways passed through the area — Bankhead Highway and Dixie Highway.

While the transportation network was improving, mill workers benefited from new opportunities brought on by the construction of schools and recreational facilities in the mill villages. One local resident who benefited from these amenities was Joseph Jefferson Jackson. The son of a tenant farmer, Jackson showed promise as a baseball player when he joined the Brandon Mill team. In 1907, he joined the Greenville Spinners. During one baseball game, he opted to play in stocking feet rather than in a pair of spiked shoes that hurt his feet. "Shoeless Joe" made his reputation as a hitter, joining the White Sox in 1915. His baseball career ended prematurely after the 1919 World Series in which he and several teammates agreed to throw the series. With his baseball career over, Jackson moved to Savannah then back to Greenville where he died in 1951 at the age of 63.

Just as Shoeless Joe was joining the White Sox, the upcountry economy was taking a hit as World War I began. The price of cotton plummeted in late summer 1914, rebounded between 1915 and 1920, and then steadily declined as the entire country sank into the Great Depression. Another important agricultural commodity from the upcountry at the turn of the century was the peach. Luckily, peaches flourished after the arrival of the refrigerated railroad car and the unsteady prices of other crops following World War I. Though not necessarily profitable, agriculture was saved in the region through the hiring of agricultural extension agents between 1914 and 1917 who encouraged cover crops, commercial fertilizer, and crop diversification.

In the early 1900s, transportation continued its theme of impacting the local economy through development and commercial opportunities. The construction of state highways had been put on hold during World War I, but it picked up steam following the war. The first road connecting county seats in the state was a topsoil road traveling from Greenville to Pickens. A survey in 1924 found that five of the twelve most traveled South Carolina roads were in Greenville County. Over the next decade, paved roads began to cover the region, including the Mountains to the Sea Highway, the Buncombe Road, and a new highway to Spartanburg. In 1931, a highway between Greenville and Atlanta was completed increasing the number of paved miles of road in Greenville County alone to more than 225.

Connecting people in other ways were newspapers such as the *Greenville News*, the *Greenville Piedmont*, and the *Fountain Inn Tribune*, which became a part of daily life in the 1920s. The decade closed with little warning of the economic depression on the horizon. The upcountry was not spared, however, from the devastation of the Great Depression. The booming banks and textile industry were hit hard as the stock market crashed, seen throughout the area in the sudden stagnation of the former population influx.

The New Deal and Labor Relations

Federal relief to Greenville area farmers and mill workers began to arrive in 1932 as President Roosevelt rolled out the New Deal. For the farmers of the upcountry, the New Deal Era ushered in low interest loans for businesses and measures aimed at reintroducing price parity to agricultural commodities. Price parity was achieved by limiting acreage, and farmers also received payments for conservation of land and soil building. For the mill workers, the New Deal provided a reduced work week and increased minimum wage.

But all was not perfect with the textile industry. Mill owners and workers had been at odds over working conditions and pay since the region's first union formed in 1886. The unrest peaked with the General Textile Strike of September 1934. The strike was not uniformly supported by workers, and violence erupted as strikers tried to force the mills closed.

The New Deal and the need for improving labor relations set the stage for the area's resurgence during World War II. The Second World War had an instantaneous effect on the economy, including a spike in textile production, increased wages, and improved cotton prices. The region's farms raised more food to feed soldiers and defense factory workers, and like the preceding wars, the textile industry benefited. Demographic patterns shifted once again, and the undermining of the segregation nearly institutionalized by Governor Tillman was begun.

The Emergence of the Modern Upcountry

World War II also laid the framework for economic activity that would drive the region into the 21st century. The Greenville Army Air Base was created in December 1942 on 2,000 acres south of Greenville. At the peak of its wartime activity, the base accounted for a monthly payroll of \$250,000. After World War II ended, the air base provided support services during the Korean conflict. No longer needed by the military, the conversion of the base in 1963 into a multimodal airport industrial park symbolically ushered Greenville and the surrounding region into the modern era of a diversified economy. Today, the 2,600-acre Donaldson Center Industrial Air Park employs more than 3,000 people as a major aircraft maintenance and modification center.

The region's venture into air travel actually began in the 1920s when the Alhayor Company began flights to take aerial photographs for real estate developers. The Greenville Airport Commission was created in 1928, and the first airport was dedicated in September. Passenger travel began in December 1930, with a ticket from Greenville to New York costing \$66.85. The opening of the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport in October 1962 provided a modern facility to support industrial growth.

The impact of the National Interstate and Highway Defense Act in 1956 rivaled that of the arrival of railroad in the 1870s. Interstate 85 crossing the area from east to west was sited not far from the Indian paths from centuries ago. The new interstate, coupled with the widening of US 276 and its connections with Interstate 26, created prime sites for industrial plants and textile mills. The opening of I-385 and I-185 in the last few decades further expanded the regional and national roadway network.

Today, the region's economy continues to expand and diversify. Textile companies remain integral, but recent additions to the area include finance, engineering, and construction companies. No doubt attracted by a transportation system that includes the airport, rail, and highways, the region has garnered an international reputation as a strategic location for growth. The future economic success and quality of life in the region hinge on the choices provided by this system.

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