

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. MillOther names/site number: Valdese Manufacturing Company, Waldensian Weavers, Inc., Valdese Weaving Company

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 108 Praley Street SWCity or town: Valdese State: North Carolina County: BurkeNot For Publication: ☐ N/AVicinity: ☐ N/A**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national      statewide   X   local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

  X   A      B      C      D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐☐

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Site

Structure

☐

Object

☐

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

0

buildings

0

0

sites

0

0

structures

0

0

objects

1

0

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT



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brick and concrete block masonry, which is painted a pale yellow. Most window openings have been infilled, but the original fenestration patterns are still apparent. Inside, the building retains open manufacturing floor plans and many original finishes, including exposed wood ceilings, exposed masonry walls, wood and steel columns, and wood and concrete floors. It retains sufficient integrity as an early to mid-twentieth century industrial building that evolved over time to meet the needs of its occupants.

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## Narrative Description

The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill building, as well as the surrounding portion of the Valdese town grid, is rotated approximately fifteen degrees east from true cardinal direction alignment. To simplify the descriptive narrative, it is written as though the mill has true north-south orientation.

## Setting

The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill (hereafter called “the mill”) occupies an approximately 1.15-acre parcel at 108 Praley Street SW in Valdese, Burke County, North Carolina (see *Location Map & Boundary Map*). Praley Street SW borders the parcel to the east, Main Street W to the north, a paved lot stretching along Waldo Street to the west, and an unnamed alley (labeled Janavel Alley on Sanborn maps) to the south. Main Street W curves southwest from Praley Street SW to the paved lot, creating an irregularly shaped parcel, and the topography slopes down from the southeast corner of the parcel to the northwest, allowing for above-grade lower levels on the north, west, and south sides of the mill building.

The mill sits along Valdese’s central business district fronting Main Street. Stretching between Morganton Street NW and Eldred Street NE/SE, the approximately one-mile-long commercial strip contains commercial buildings ranging in date from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first, as well as the historic Waldensian Presbyterian Church (1896-99) and Valdese Elementary School (1922-23), and surface parking and vacant lots are interspersed throughout.<sup>2</sup> The mill occupies the southwest corner of Praley Street NW/SW<sup>3</sup> and Main Street W (*Photo 1*); a gas station (1995) occupies the northwest corner of the intersection, a bank (1964) occupies the northeast corner, and a vacant lot followed by a row of one- and two-story commercial buildings (circa 1930s) occupies the southeast corner. Residential homes occupy the area across Praley Street SW to the southeast of the mill and south of the commercial district. A single-story manufacturing facility (1951) occupies the parcel across the alley to the south of the mill,

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<sup>2</sup> The Waldensian Presbyterian Church, located at 104 Main Street E, and the Valdese Elementary School, located at 400 Main Street W, were both individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. They are still extant.

<sup>3</sup> Main Street W forms the divider between Praley Street NW and SW.

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and a parking lot occupies the lot across Waldo Street to the west. The historic Waldensian Hosiery Mill and Pilot Full Fashion Mill complexes are located along the railroad tracks three blocks to the south.<sup>4</sup>

The mill building fills the majority of its parcel. To the east and north, it abuts sidewalks and narrow strips of grass that extend along Praley Street SW and Main Street W, and its south elevation directly abuts the paved alley (*Photos 1-4 & 6*). Near the northeast corner, an asphalt drive and concrete sidewalk lead to east elevation loading docks recessed from Praley Street SW, and a small grassy area with a large evergreen tree extends from the dock area to Main Street W. At the northwest corner of the building, asphalt and another grassy area extend between the north sidewalk and the portion of the north elevation recessed from Main Street W. At the southwest corner of the building, an asphalt loading dock extends between the alley and the portion of the south elevation recessed from the alley. A concrete block retaining wall extends along the west line of the loading dock to accommodate the change in topography; a concrete stair at the north end of the dock provides access to the lower portion of the parcel. An asphalt parking lot with a sidewalk extending along and at grade with Waldo Street sits to the west of the mill (*Photo 5*); this portion of the parcel formerly contained two residential dwellings fronting Waldo Street and a commercial building fronting Main Street W. The dwellings were demolished sometime between 1950 and 1964, and the commercial building was demolished by 1984.<sup>5</sup> Electrical poles line the east side of the parcel, and non-historic streetlamps line the north side along Main Street W. A non-historic metal bench sits near the northeast corner of the parcel.

## Building Evolution

The mill was constructed in phases, starting with the original 1915 building and ending with the last addition in the early 1970s (see *Building Evolution Map* and *Photo Maps* for keyed maps and floor plans showing these phases). The mill now contains approximately 59,500 square feet across three levels, which for the purposes of this narrative are referred to as the upper, mid, and lower levels. The upper level extends across the 1915, c. 1920, c. 1925, and c. 1941 portions of the mill. It sits at grade with Praley Street SW at the southeast corner of the building; as the building extends north and west and the topography slopes, it effectively becomes the second and then third above-grade story. The lower level extends across the c. 1925, c. 1941, and c. 1950s-1970s portions of the mill. It sits at grade or slightly

<sup>4</sup> The Waldensian Hosiery Mill complex (established in 1901) is located at 309 Colombo Street SW, and the Pilot Full Fashion Mill complex (established in 1928) is located at 408 Praley Street SW. Neither is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>5</sup> This paved lot is part of the current legal parcel on which the mill sits today; it is excluded from the historic boundary as it was not historically associated with the mill during its period of significance (1915-1974). The dwellings and commercial building are extant on the 1950 Sanborn map (*Figures 3 & 4*). According to available historic aerial images, the dwellings were gone by 1964 (within the period of significance). The commercial building remained in 1976 (past the period of significance) and was gone by 1984; the existing parking lot footprint was in place by 1984 (Netronline, Historic Aerials, [historicaerials.com](http://historicaerials.com); USGS Historic Aerials, [earthexplorer.usgs.gov](http://earthexplorer.usgs.gov)).

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higher than Waldo Street and extends partially below grade at the southeast corner of the c. 1941 addition. The mid-level extends across all portions of the mill. It sits below grade at the southeast corner of the building and extends fully above grade along the north and west elevations as well as the north end of the east elevation and the west end of the south elevation.

In 1915, the initial building was constructed of brick at the southeast corner of the parcel (*Figure 5*). Approximately one hundred feet long and sixty-five feet wide, it rises one story (upper level) above a partial basement (mid-level). Circa 1920, an L-shaped brick addition was constructed along the north and west elevation of the 1915 building, extending approximately sixty-five feet to the west and thirty-eight feet to the north. This addition also rises one story (upper level) above a basement (mid-level); due to the sloped topography of the site, its basement (mid-level) is partially above-grade with a fully above-grade west elevation. Inside, the 1915 upper-level north and west exterior walls were removed, save for the east one-third of the north elevation, to create an open interior plan. The 1915 lower-level exterior walls remain.

The mill expanded again circa 1925 with an L-shaped brick addition constructed along the north elevation of the c. 1920 addition (*Figure 8*). The spine extends approximately thirty-two feet north from the c. 1920 north elevation, while the ell at the northwest corner is approximately fifty-two feet long and fifty-two feet wide. It rises two stories (upper and mid-level) above a partial lower level. All levels are above-grade along the north and west elevations; the mid-level is partially below-grade at the southeast corner of the spine. Inside, the c. 1920 north elevation wall was retained on both the upper and mid-levels. Around the same time, a small, three-story (upper, mid-, and lower levels) brick wing was constructed from the west elevation of the c. 1920 addition near the north end. It extends west approximately six feet and is approximately twelve feet wide; inside, the c. 1920 north elevation wall was retained on all levels. By circa 1930, a small, detached, one-story (lower level) boiler room with a metal smokestack sat to the west of the c. 1920 addition; it was no longer extant by the late 1960s (*Figures 1 & 2*).<sup>6</sup>

Several smaller additions were constructed in the 1930s and 1940s as the company expanded. Circa 1935, a two-story (mid- and lower levels) brick dye house was constructed between the c. 1920 addition and the boiler room. This addition extends west from the c. 1920 addition approximately fifteen feet and is approximately forty feet wide. Inside, the c. 1920 west elevation walls were retained. Around the same time, a one-story (lower level) welding shop was constructed off the southwest corner of the boiler room, and a one-story (lower level) brick picker room was constructed at the northwest corner of the c. 1925 addition (*Figures 3, 4, 12, & 13*). The c. 1925 west elevation walls were retained. The welding shop was no longer extant by 1962, and the picker room was demolished sometime between 1985 and 1993.<sup>7</sup> Circa 1941, an addition was constructed to the east of the c. 1925 ell (*Figure 11*). It matches the length of the

<sup>6</sup> Netronline, Historic Aerials, [historicaerials.com](http://historicaerials.com); USGS Historic Aerials, [earthexplorer.usgs.gov](http://earthexplorer.usgs.gov).

<sup>7</sup> Netronline, Historic Aerials, [historicaerials.com](http://historicaerials.com); USGS Historic Aerials, [earthexplorer.usgs.gov](http://earthexplorer.usgs.gov).

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ell at approximately fifty-two feet and extends east approximately forty feet. It rises three stories (upper, mid-, and lower level); the lower level is below-grade along the east elevation but is fully above-grade along the north elevation. Inside, the c. 1925 north and east elevation walls were removed on the upper level to create an open interior plan. On the mid-level, the east elevation wall was removed but the north elevation wall remains, and on the lower level, the east elevation wall remains (the c. 1925 north elevation did not extend this far east on the lower level).

Additional alterations occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1950 and 1962, a two-story (mid- and lower levels) concrete block addition was constructed at the southwest corner of the c. 1920 addition, to the south of the dye house and boiler room (*Figure 12*). It is approximately fifty-five feet long and extends west from the c. 1920 addition approximately sixty feet. It rises two stories (mid- and lower levels), with the lower level slightly below-grade along the east side. Inside, the c. 1920 west elevation wall remains on the mid-level (the c. 1920 addition does not contain a lower level). Around the same time, a small, one-story (upper level) wood-frame covered loading dock was constructed to the south of the original 1915 building. It is approximately sixteen feet wide and extends from the south elevation approximately ten feet. A large opening, nearly equal to the width of the addition, was created in the south elevation wall of the 1915 building to provide access to the dock.

In the late 1960s, the original boiler room was demolished to accommodate a new brick addition. This addition envelops the c. 1935 addition, creating a taller, double-height second story (mid-level); it extends west from the c. 1935 addition, along the north elevation of the c. 1950s addition, approximately sixty-eight feet and matches the width of the c. 1935 addition at approximately forty feet. The original c. 1935 north elevation wall with brick rowlock coping course is visible on the exterior, enveloped by the c. 1960s brick elevation; the original c. 1935 south elevation wall is also visible on the interior, enveloped by the c. 1960s addition. Most of this addition rises two stories (mid- and lower levels) with a double-height mid-level, both completely above-grade, with a one-story (lower level) portion extending across the west side; due to the sloped topography of the site, this one-story portion steps down slightly from the rest of the lower level and is completely at grade with Waldo Street. Inside, the c. 1935 west elevation wall was removed on the mid-level to create an open interior space; on the lower level, a non-original concrete block wall replaced the original c. 1935 west elevation wall. The c. 1950s north elevation walls remain.

The final addition to the building, a metal-frame addition dating to the late 1960s or early 1970s, extends north from the two-story c. 1960s addition approximately twenty-six feet and is approximately thirty feet wide. It rises one story (lower level) and is above grade.

## Exterior

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The 1915 original building and west portion of the c. 1920 addition features a tri-gabled roof covered with rubber membrane.<sup>8</sup> Flat rubber membrane roofs cover the north portion of the c. 1920 addition as well as all subsequent additions, with the exception of the small c. 1925 west elevation wing, which has a shallow shed roof. The 1915, c. 1920, c. 1925, and c. 1941 portions feature shallow eaves, and exposed rafter tails accent the c. 1925 and c. 1941 portions. Parapet walls capped with tile coping surround the roof on the c. 1960s addition, while parapet walls capped with metal coping surround the roof on the c. 1950s addition. A freight elevator overrun rises from the c.1925 roof; the overrun has a flat roof with shallow eaves and exposed rafter tails, and painted corrugated metal clads the walls.

The 1915 original building and c. 1920, c. 1925, c. 1941, and c. 1960s additions are constructed of common-bond red brick. The 1915 building and c. 1920 addition have parged rubble stone mid-level and foundation walls.<sup>9</sup> The c. 1925, c. 1941, and c. 1960s additions do not have foundations visible above grade. The c. 1950s addition is constructed of concrete block with a concrete foundation. The c. 1970s addition has frame construction with vertical aluminum siding and a concrete foundation. Pale yellow paint covers the entire exterior; the brick portions of the building appear to have been unpainted within the period of significance.

### East Elevation

The east elevation faces Praley Street SW (*Photos 1-3*). Twenty-one bays organize the elevation; from south to north, bays 1 through 9 correspond with the 1915 building, bays 10 through 13 correspond with the c. 1920 addition, bays 14 through 17 correspond with the c. 1925 addition, and bays 18 through 21 correspond with the c. 1941 addition.

Bays 1 and 9 each contain a brick-infilled egress opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header. Bays 2 through 8 each contain a brick-infilled window opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header and a brick double rowlock sill; the sill in bay 4 is no longer extant. Non-original square vents are

<sup>8</sup> The tri-gabled roofline is fairly unique; it does not appear elsewhere on extant buildings in Valdese or the surrounding area. Other early-nineteenth century mill buildings in the area have somewhat higher pitched gable roofs, such as the Waldensian Hosiery Mill in Valdese (*Figure 14*) and the Garrou—Morganton Fully-Fashioned Hosiery Mills in Morganton (*Figure 15*). The subject property appears to have the only instance of multiple gables stacked side-by-side. It is unknown why the builders chose this type of construction; it does not appear to provide any benefit for space planning and positioning machinery inside.

<sup>9</sup> The use of rubble stone construction is a common traditional Waldensian building practice, both in the original Waldensian homeland in the Cottian Alps area of northern Italy and in the immigrant settlement of Valdese. Traditionally, the stone was laid without mortar and was unparged. Many of the earliest surviving homes and buildings in Valdese are constructed of rubble stone masonry, although many have been parged over (as are the exterior rubble stone walls at the subject property). The Valdese Manufacturing Company mill is a good example of an extant, unparged rubble stone and brick masonry mill building (*Figure 16*). J. Randall Cotton, *Historic Burke: An Architectural Sites Inventory of Burke County* (Morganton, North Carolina: Historic Burke Foundation, Inc., 1987), 32-34.

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located within each gable in bays 2, 5, and 8. Bay 8 contains a non-original metal grate at the foundation level, and a piece of mechanical equipment sits in front of bay 8.

Bay 10 contains a non-original rectangular egress opening with two-panel kalamein double-leaf doors, which modified a narrower egress opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header; the header is still extant. A concrete stoop extends from bay 10 with concrete steps extending south from the stoop along the building elevation. A nook within the stoop contains a 1936 water valve. Bays 11 through 13 each contain brick-infilled window openings at the upper and mid-levels. The upper-level window openings have segmental double rowlock arch headers and brick double rowlock sills; the mid-level windows are rectangular without visible headers or sills and set within the parged rubble stone foundation.

Bay 14 contains an egress opening with a non-historic single-leaf aluminum-frame door and transom. A concrete stoop and steps with metal tube railings extends east from bay 14; a non-historic arched fabric canopy extends from the building to cover the stoop and steps. Bays 15 through 17 each contain brick-infilled window openings at the upper and mid-levels. The upper-level window openings are rectangular with concrete sills; the mid-level windows are rectangular without visible sills. A non-historic sign hangs from the elevation at the upper level over bays 16 and 17.

Bays 18 and 19 at the mid-level each contain rectangular loading dock openings with non-original metal overhead doors. Bays 18 and 19 at the upper level each contain a large, brick-infilled rectangular window opening with a brick double rowlock sill. A metal fire escape extends across bays 20 and 21 consisting of a metal platform at the upper level and a metal spiral stair situated in front of bay 20. Bay 20 at the upper level contains a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf wood paneled door that leads to the fire escape. At the lower level, bay 20 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening with a concrete sill. Bay 21 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening with a concrete sill at the upper and mid-levels. Corbeled brick stringcourses extend across bays 18 through 21 above and below the loading dock openings and lower window openings.

#### North Elevation

The north elevation faces Main Street W (*Photos 1 & 4*). Twenty bays organize the elevation; from east to west, bays 1 through 3 correspond with the c. 1925 addition, bays 4 through 7 correspond with the c. 1941 addition, bays 8 through 13 correspond again with the c. 1925 addition, bay 14 corresponds with the c. 1925 small wing addition, bay 15 corresponds with the c. 1935 addition, and bays 16 through 20 correspond with the c. 1960s addition.

Bays 1 through 3 each contain shallow vertical recesses within the masonry that correspond with the width of the window openings. Bay 1 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels. Bay 2 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper level and two side-

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by-side but separate rectangular window openings at the mid-level. Bay 3 is blind with a non-historic square metal vent at the upper level. Bays 4 through 7 each contain a brick-infilled rectangular window opening with a concrete sill at the upper, mid-, and lower levels. Bays 8 through 13 each contain shallow vertical recesses within the masonry that correspond with the width of the window openings. Bays 8 and 9 each contain a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels. A square opening with a metal roll-up door extends across both bays at the lower level. Bays 10 through 13 each contain a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels; the lower levels are blind. Window openings in bays 10 through 13 at the upper level have been altered; the original openings were extended to the east and partially enclosed to accommodate smaller replacement windows (neither original nor replacement windows are currently extant). The vertical masonry recess in bay 10 was subsequently extended to the east to accommodate the replacement windows.

Bay 14 contains no fenestration; a metal stair with a wood canopy that leads to a west-elevation egress extends from the west elevation over bay 14 at the mid- and lower levels. Bays 15 through 19 each contain a rectangular window opening with a brick rowlock sill and a steel 4-over-4 window at the mid-level. The window in bay 15 sits within a larger, partially brick-infilled window opening. Bays 15 and 16 each contain a wood-infilled rectangular window opening with a brick rowlock sill at the lower level. Bay 19 contains a rectangular opening with a brick rowlock sill; a metal vent fills the opening. A round metal exhaust vent extends over bay 17 and above the roofline. A shed with a metal shed roof, wire mesh walls, and a wire mesh door extends from bay 15 at the lower level. The c. 1970s addition extends from bays 16 through 18 at the lower level. Its north elevation contains a metal overhead door near the west end, its east elevation contains a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf slab door at the north end, its west elevations is blank.

Bay 20 contains a rectangular egress opening with two-panel kalamein double-leaf doors at the lower level. Three rectangular metal vents extend in a horizontal line at the parapet.

#### West Elevation

The west elevation faces Waldo Street and the parking lot to the west side of the property (*Photo 5*). Fourteen bays organize the elevation; from north to south, bays 1 through 5 correspond with the c. 1925 addition, bays 6 and 7 correspond with the c. 1920 addition, bay 8 corresponds with the c. 1925 small wing addition, bays 9 through 11 correspond with the c. 1960s addition, and bays 12 through 14 correspond with the c. 1950s addition.

Bays 1 through 3 each contain shallow vertical recesses within the masonry that correspond with the width of the window openings. Bay 1 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels and a rectangular metal overhead door at the lower level. A non-historic sign hangs between the upper and mid-levels. Bays 2 and 3 each contain a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the

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upper and mid-levels; the lower level is blind. Bay 4 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper, mid-, and lower-levels; a rectangular metal vent partially fills the mid-level opening. Mechanical equipment sits on the ground in front of bay 4. Bay 5 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels; a rectangular metal vent partially fills the mid-level opening. The lower level contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening with a brick rowlock sill to the north and a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf metal slab door to the south. A shed-roof canopy extends from bay 5 over the egress at the lower level.

Bay 6 contains a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the upper and mid-levels; a metal vent partially fills the upper-level opening. Bay 7 contains a metal vent at the upper level and a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf metal slab door at the mid-level. A metal stair with a wood canopy that extends from the west elevation across the mid- and lower levels. Bay 8 projects slightly west and is blind with two side-by-side metal vents at the upper level.

Bays 9 through 11 at the lower level each contain a rectangular metal vent at the parapet line, a brick-infilled rectangular window opening, and a rectangular metal vent near the foundation line. An exhaust pipe extends from the north side of bay 9. Bays 9 through 11 at the mid-level each contain a rectangular window opening with a brick rowlock sill and a steel 4-over-4 window.

Bay 12 contains a rectangular egress opening with double-leaf metal slab doors. Bay 13 is blind with a vent at the lower level. Bay 14 is blind with a rectangular metal vent at the north end; mechanical equipment extends across the base. Metal conduit extends across bays 12 through 13 above the egress opening.

#### South Elevation

The south elevation faces the alley (*Photo 6*). Twenty bays organize the elevation; from west to east, bays 1 and 2 correspond with the c. 1960s addition, bays 3 through 6 correspond with the c. 1950s addition, bays 7 through 13 correspond with the c. 1920 addition, and bays 14 through 20 correspond with the 1915 building.

Bay 1 contains a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf metal slab door at the lower level. Bay 2 is blind; a metal exhaust pipe extends from the east side. Bays 3 through 5 each contain a concrete block-infilled rectangular window opening at the mid-level. Bay 3 contains a rectangular metal vent at the lower level, bay 4 contains a rectangular egress opening with two-panel kalamein double-leaf doors at the lower level, and bay 5 contains a rectangular metal vent at the mid-level. A metal service ladder hangs from the elevation between bays 5 and 6. Bay 6 contains a metal overhead door at the mid-level. An angled brick loading dock with a wood canopy extends from bay 6.

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Bays 7 and 8 at the upper level each contain a brick-infilled window opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header and a brick double rowlock sill. The mid-level contains a partially-brick-infilled rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf slab metal door between the bays; concrete steps with metal tube railings extend from the egress opening. Bays 9 through 13 each contain a brick-infilled window opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header and a brick double rowlock sill at the upper level and a brick-infilled rectangular window opening at the mid-level. The mid-level opening in bay 9 contains a metal vent. Bays 14 through 17 and bay 20 each contain a brick-infilled window opening with a segmental double rowlock arch header and a brick double rowlock sill at the upper level. A small, square covered loading dock with a flat metal roof and T1-11 siding, dating to the c. 1950s, extends south from bays 16 and 17. Its south and west elevations each contain a paneled wood overhead door with glazing and its east elevation contains a rectangular egress opening with a single-leaf metal slab door; a metal canopy and concrete steps extend from its east elevation.

## Interior

### 1915 Building and c. 1920 Addition

The upper level is largely one space (*Photo 7*). A portion of the original 1915 north exterior brick wall, covered with drywall, extends from the east elevation, and some non-historic drywall partitioning occurs along the north and west walls. A non-historic dropped ACT grid covers historic painted wood rafters and roof decking. Non-historic drywall covers painted brick perimeter walls. The space features painted chamfered wood columns and hardwood floors.

The mid-level contains three main spaces: southeast, northeast, and west. The southeast space is the basement of the 1915 building. The ceiling is exposed wood, the perimeter walls are exposed rubble stone, and the floors are concrete. A mixture of non-original wood plank, concrete, and concrete block partitions occur throughout the space, and non-original steel I-beams, concrete piers, and round lally columns support the structure. The northeast and west spaces correspond with the c. 1920 addition (*Photo 10*). A non-original drywall partition separates the spaces. Both feature painted wood joist and decking ceilings and concrete floors. Walls are a mixture of painted brick, painted and partially parged rubble stone, and painted concrete block. Painted square wood columns extend throughout the northeast space; painted brick piers extend along the south wall in the northeast space. Painted steel I-beam columns extend throughout the west space. Window openings with wood panel infill are visible along the north wall, which was originally a perimeter wall and now separates the c. 1920 addition and the c. 1925 addition. It is unknown if historic windows are extant behind the infill.

This portion of the mill contains no vertical circulation.

### c. 1925 and c. 1941 Additions

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The upper level contains non-original drywall partitioning throughout, largely concentrated in the east and northwest portion of the c. 1925 addition; large, open spaces remain in the 1941 addition (*Photo 8*) and the southwest corner of the c. 1925 addition (*Photo 9*). Non-historic dropped ACT covers painted wood rafters and roof decking. A mixture of non-historic drywall and wood paneling covers the perimeter walls; it is assumed that perimeter walls were historically either exposed or painted brick, but the underlying condition is unknown. The space features square and chamfered wood columns; some have been wrapped with drywall or wood trim and some have been removed. Floors are historic hardwood throughout most of the space; carpet covers the floors in some of the southeast corridor and offices and linoleum covers the floors in the southwest corner and the underlying condition is unknown.

The mid-level contains two main spaces: north and south. The south space corresponds with the c. 1925 addition, and the north space corresponds with the c. 1925 and c. 1941 additions (*Photo 11*). A non-original drywall partition separates the spaces, and the south space contains some non-historic wood panel partitioning. Ceilings are painted wood joists and decking; dropped painted wood panels cover the ceiling in the c. 1925 portion. The south wall is the original c. 1920 perimeter wall; it is painted, partially parged rubble stone and window openings with wood panel infill are visible. It is unknown if historic windows are extant behind the infill. North, west, and east perimeter walls are painted brick. Floors are concrete in the south space and hardwood in the north space. Painted square wood columns extend throughout.

The lower level contains three main spaces: northeast, northwest, and southwest. The northwest and southwest spaces correspond with the c. 1925 addition (*Photo 14*), and the northeast space corresponds with the c. 1941 addition. Ceilings and floors are concrete and walls are unpainted brick. Unpainted square wood columns extend throughout. A non-original steel I-beam joist and I-beam columns extends north-south across the northwest space.

Vertical circulation includes a staircase at the southeast corner of the c. 1925 addition that extends between the upper and mid-levels, a staircase at the southwest corner of the c. 1925 addition that extends between the lower and mid-levels, and a freight elevator near the southeast corner of the c. 1925 addition that extends between the upper and mid-levels. Carpet covers the southeast corner stairs and the underlying materials are unknown. The southwest corner stairs are concrete. The freight elevator retains its cab and kalamein doors.

#### c. 1950s Addition

The mid-level is one open space (*Photo 12*). Ceilings are painted wood rafters and decking and floors are hardwood. The east wall is the original c. 1920 perimeter wall; it is painted brick and parged rubble stone, and window openings with brick infill are discernable. The north, south, and west walls are painted concrete block. Thin round metal columns extend throughout the space.

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The lower level contains three spaces: north, southwest, and southeast. The southeast space sits slightly higher than the north and southwest spaces; a concrete ramp in the southeast space accommodates the change in floor height. Ceilings are partially painted wood rafters and floors are concrete. Walls in the north and northwest spaces are painted concrete block; walls in the northeast space are unpainted concrete block. The southeast space contains thin round metal columns as well as non-original steel I-beam joists and columns.

Vertical circulation includes a wood stair and a freight lift, both at the northeast corner. The freight elevator retains its platform and metal grate doors.

#### c. 1935 and 1960s Additions

The mid-level is one open space (*Photo 13*). Steel I-beam rafters and metal decking are exposed at the ceiling, and walls are painted brick. The floor at the east end, corresponding with the c. 1935 addition, is hardwood, while the c. 1960s portion of the floor is concrete.

The lower level contains two spaces: east and west. The east space corresponds with the c. 1935 addition and contains some non-historic concrete block partitioning at the south end. Ceilings in the east space are painted wood joists and decking, and ceilings in the west space are painted concrete. Both spaces have unpainted brick and concrete block walls, and unpainted concrete floors. The east space contains steel I-beam joists and steel I-beam columns with square concrete bases, as well as a concrete ramp leading up to the c. 1970s addition to the north.

Vertical circulation consists of a metal stair with metal tube railings at the southeast corner.

#### c. 1970s Addition

The c. 1970s addition is one open space with a small closet at the southeast corner. Plastic sheeting over batt insulation covers the ceiling and north, east, and west walls; the painted brick c. 1960s north elevation forms the north wall. The floor is concrete.

### **Integrity**

The mill retains historic integrity under Criterion A as a local example of an early to mid-twentieth century industrial manufacturing facility that evolved frequently over time to meet the changing needs of the textile companies it housed. While the mill has experienced additions and alterations since its initial 1915 construction, most fall within the period of significance—1915 to 1974—which corresponds to the time it was active as a textile manufacturing facility. Alterations past the period of significance include the demolition of the picker house addition, infilled window openings, painted exterior, and interior

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partitioning and finishes. Despite these alterations, the building is still able to convey its identity as an early to mid-twentieth century mill.

Situated at its original location surrounded by commercial, industrial, and residential zones, the building possesses integrity of *location* and *setting*. The building also possesses integrity of *design* and *materials*. While painted, the mill retains its masonry exterior walls, and while most windows have been removed and their openings infilled, the outlines of historic window openings are visible and the fenestration patterns are discernable and are still able to convey the original design intent. On the interior, non-original partitioning occurs in some areas, particularly in the upper level of the c. 1925 and c. 1941 additions, and non-original finishes occur throughout, particularly in the upper level. However, the impact of these alterations is minor to the building overall. The majority of the interior retains its open floorplans, as well as historic masonry walls, hardwood and concrete floors, and wood and metal columns. Exploratory demolition also reveals that original brick perimeter walls and exposed roof and ceiling structure are largely extant under non-original finishes. *Workmanship* is evident in the brick masonry, rubble stone foundation, and exposed rafter tail details. With its sprawling footprint, utilitarian design and materials, and open interior floor plates, the building effectively communicates its *feeling* and *association* as an early to mid-twentieth century mill that expanded from a small, early venture into manufacturing into a dominating force and significant contributor to the local industrial economy.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1915-1974

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1915 (initial construction)

c. 1920, c. 1925, c. 1935, c. 1941, c. 1950s, c. late 1960s, c. early 1970s (additions)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill<sup>10</sup> (“the mill”), located in the town of Valdese in Burke County, North Carolina, is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of INDUSTRY. The mill played an important role in the Waldensian community of Valdese as it transitioned from a primarily agrarian community to a center of the textile industry in Burke County.

Valdese was first colonized in the early 1890s by a small group of Waldensian immigrants from the Cottian Alps in northern Italy. After the Waldensian migrants, whose community in northern Italy was primarily agricultural, found the land in Valdese to be rocky and ill-suited to farming, they turned to industry and quickly transformed into a fast-growing industrial community.

Initially established in 1915 as the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company, the mill was one of the earliest large-scale industrial endeavors in Valdese. Additionally, the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc., Mill was the only mill in Valdese to manufacture lace and embroidery products and the only mill in Valdese to target the local furniture industry with the production of upholstery fabrics; most other textile mills in Valdese largely produced apparel products such as hosiery and undergarments. While the mill cycled through different ownership and company names throughout the twentieth century, it was in near-continuous operation as a major local employer and manufacturer of textile goods for nearly sixty years. The period of significance, 1915 to 1974, begins with the building’s initial construction and ends with the relocation of Valdese Weavers, Inc. to a new facility on a separate site.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Early History of Valdese**

The town of Valdese, North Carolina is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was first colonized in the early 1890s by a small group of French-speaking Waldensian immigrants from the Cottian Alps area of northern Italy. The Waldenses, also called the Waldensians, originated in the twelfth century

<sup>10</sup> The historic name, Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weaver’s Inc. Mill, consists of the first and last textile companies to inhabit the mill during the period of significance. As the historic name, they act as bookends to the full history of the mill within the period of significance while maintaining a reasonably manageable title.

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as a proto-Protestant sect of Western Christianity. Branded as heretics by the Catholic Church, they faced centuries of persecution.<sup>11</sup> Considerable emigration began in the mid-nineteenth century following economic hardship caused by multiple poor crop harvests and overcrowding in the narrow valleys of the Alps. Entire groups moved to other parts of Europe as well as to the Americas, with a large group settling in what is now Valdese, North Carolina.<sup>12</sup> Valdese became the largest Waldensian colony located outside of Italy, and the “largest and most important Waldensian colony in North America.”<sup>13</sup>

While it is unclear precisely how, Waldensian leaders made contact with Marvin Scaife, a wealthy industrialist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who owned large amounts of land in both Pittsburgh and Burke County, North Carolina. Scaife offered to sell the Waldenses a tract of land in Burke County for a new colony, and in March 1893, two Waldensian representatives, Jean Bounous and Louis Richard, traveled to North Carolina to assess the opportunity.<sup>14</sup> When they arrived, they were disappointed to find that most of the arable land in Burke County was already claimed. The Waldensian community in northern Italy was primarily agricultural, and while the land offered for purchase was plentiful with lumber, it was inadequate to serve a migrant agrarian colony, with “its mountainous and rocky nature not being adapted to agriculture or farming.”<sup>15</sup> However, Bounous and Richard did settle on a tract of land, hoping that “if not a Canaan, at least such that the cultivation of tobacco, wheat, corn, oats, and especially the vine would be successful.”<sup>16</sup> They sent word home “certifying that the lands were good,” and moved forward with a contract for ten thousand acres.<sup>17</sup> Located approximately eight miles east of Morganton, the Burke County seat, this pocket of land became the colony of Valdese, named after its founding immigrant community.<sup>18</sup>

The first group of twenty-nine Waldenses arrived in May 1893 to prepare the colony for additional migrants who arrived in groups in the late summer and fall. By the end of that year, Valdese was home to around 230 Waldensian immigrants.<sup>19</sup> The colony faced significant hardship over the first few years. They struggled to cultivate enough food in the poor, rocky soil ill-suited to farming.<sup>20</sup> Most early migrants also arrived with very little money, and while residents in neighboring communities extended some help, the language barrier made communication difficult.<sup>21</sup> François Garrou, who arrived in 1893 at the age of

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<sup>11</sup> Lala Carr Steelman, “Waldensians,” in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://ncpedia.org/waldensians>.

<sup>12</sup> George B. Watts, *The Waldenses in the New World* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1941), 45, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Watts, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Watts, 79, 82.

<sup>15</sup> Watts, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Watts, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Watts, 83,

<sup>18</sup> Watts, 79-81.; Steelman.

<sup>19</sup> Watts, 84-85, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Watts, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Watts, 99.; Steelman.

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sixteen and went on to establish the town's first textile mill, later recounted that "our first business for several months after located in Valdese was starving to death."<sup>22</sup> By the end of the century, the Waldenses had made progress in cultivating the land, with many farmers individually managing fifteen to twenty acres. Crops included corn, wheat, oats, vegetables, and potatoes, and most families also kept grape vineyards for winemaking.<sup>23</sup> Beginning in the early twentieth century, however, the Waldenses turned to industry, which kickstarted the town's economic growth.

## Contextual History of the Textile Industry in Valdese, Burke County, and the South

### North Carolina and the South

The origins of the industrial growth that took place in Valdese at the turn of the twentieth century can be traced to Reconstruction era developments throughout Burke County and the South following the U.S. Civil War. While the North began to shift to an industrial economy during the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the South remained predominately agricultural. By 1860, ninety percent of manufacturing production in the United States occurred in the North, and only about forty percent of its population worked in the agrarian economy; by contrast, eighty-four percent of the South's population was still engaged in agriculture.<sup>24</sup> Even within the agricultural sector, the North became increasingly mechanized, which increased productivity, while the South continued to rely on and invest only in the forced labor of enslaved people.<sup>25</sup> Industrial production that did take place in the antebellum South occurred at a much smaller scale than production in the North.<sup>26</sup> Following the Civil War, agriculture remained a dominant industry in the South, but industrialization increased rapidly over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the region attempted to rebuild and improve its physical landscape, diversify and strengthen its economy, and increase transportation networks to the North.<sup>27</sup>

### *Textile Manufacturing in the South*

Industrial cotton manufacturing in particular expanded in the South following the Civil War. By the start of the Civil War, cotton had become one of the most important industries in the United States, as well as the largest single industry in the world, with twenty million people worldwide involved in either growing

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<sup>22</sup> Watts, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Edward W. Phifer Jr., *Burke County: A Brief History* (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Division of Archives and History, 1979), 82.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin T. Arrington, "Industry and Economy During the Civil War," National Park Service, 2011, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/industry-and-economy-during-the-civil-war.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Arrington.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce W. Eelman, "Industrialization," South Carolina Encyclopedia, University of South Carolina Institute for Southern Studies, revised Aug. 5, 2022, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/industrialization/>.

<sup>27</sup> John R. deTreville, "Manufacturing, Part 4: Postwar Struggles and the Growth of the Milling, Tobacco, and Textile Industries," in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), [https://www.ncpedia.org/manufacturing\\_part\\_4](https://www.ncpedia.org/manufacturing_part_4).

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cotton or manufacturing cotton goods.<sup>28</sup> It was the industry that put the United States, then still a young and relatively small country, on the global economic map.<sup>29</sup> After industrial cotton manufacturing began in England in the mid-eighteenth century, the United States quickly dominated global cotton production due to a rich supply of credit, colonized land with the ideal conditions for growing raw cotton, and enslaved labor.<sup>30</sup> By 1860, raw cotton comprised just over sixty percent of all U.S. exports, with the majority grown in the South.<sup>31</sup> The United States also became one of the top producers in the world of manufactured cotton goods by volume of product, but manufacturing remained concentrated in the North until after the Civil War.<sup>32</sup> Some small-scale textile mills opened in the antebellum South as early as the 1820s, and production increased during the Civil War to make uniforms and other items for the Confederate military; by the end of the Civil War, the Confederacy received all its textile goods from North Carolina.<sup>33</sup> However, most large, industrial-scale textile mills in the United States operated in New England with a concentration in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; in 1860, the two states combined possessed nearly fifty percent of all cotton mill spindles in the country, with thirty percent in Massachusetts alone.<sup>34</sup>

Following the Civil War, the number of textile mills in the South dramatically increased. As part of the Reconstruction effort, the United States Congress encouraged textile production in the South with a law that exempted federal taxes on cotton textiles manufactured in the same district where the cotton was grown. Not only were new mill companies established, but many northern mill companies also began moving their facilities from New England to the South to exploit the tax benefits and cheaper, non-union labor.<sup>35</sup> Between 1880 and 1910, the greatest concentration of textile mill construction in the South occurred in North Carolina, particularly in the Piedmont region, followed by South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>36</sup> Steam power was increasingly used during this period, which not only made mills more efficient, but also eliminated the need to site them near sources of water power, increasing the number of places they could be constructed.<sup>37</sup> Between 1877 and 1884, the number of mills in North Carolina grew

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<sup>28</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015), 242.

<sup>29</sup> Beckert, 243.

<sup>30</sup> Beckert, 243.

<sup>31</sup> Beckert, 243.

<sup>32</sup> Melvin Thomas Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), vii.

<sup>33</sup> Brent D. Glass and Kelly Kress, "Textiles, Part 2: The Rise of the North Carolina Textile Industry," in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://www.ncpedia.org/textiles-part-2-rise-north-carolina>.

<sup>34</sup> Copeland, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>36</sup> Copeland, 35.; Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>37</sup> Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 480.

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from under forty, most of which had existed before the war, to seventy-five.<sup>38</sup> By 1900, the state contained 177 cotton mills, which in total employed over 30,000 workers and produced over \$28 million worth of goods.<sup>39</sup> These early mills were largely furnished with inexpensive equipment and mainly produced low-grade coarse yarns; a few mills with weaving equipment also produced heavy woven goods and industrial fabrics.<sup>40</sup>

Increased demand for textiles during World War I, including uniforms, blankets, and other military supplies, further stimulated the textile economy and led to the construction of more mills.<sup>41</sup> Between 1914 and 1921, textile production in North Carolina more than doubled.<sup>42</sup> Production continued to increase, and by 1923, North Carolina had surpassed Massachusetts as the top textile-producing state in the country by value of product.<sup>43</sup> The state continued to be a major producer of textiles between World War I and World War II as new textile technologies and synthetic fibers such as rayon, acetate, nylon, and acrylic transformed the industry.<sup>44</sup> During World War II, North Carolina produced more textile products for the military than any other state, with its mills manufacturing blankets, sheets, clothing, tents, bandages, and parachutes.<sup>45</sup>

The textile industry in North Carolina and other southern states sustained growth in the decades immediately following World War II, particularly as northern mills continued to relocate their operations to the South, where unions were weaker and wages were lower. Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, foreign competition began to undercut the low wages of the South, leading to mergers and an overall decline in the industry.<sup>46</sup> Between 1975 and 1985, over eight hundred mills closed across the United States.<sup>47</sup> In North Carolina, textile mill employment peaked in 1973 with 293,600 workers; by 1986, employment had fallen to 211,300. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, numerous free trade agreements led

<sup>38</sup> deTreville, "Manufacturing, Part 4."

<sup>39</sup> Lefler and Newsome, 479.

<sup>40</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>41</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>42</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>43</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 2."

<sup>44</sup> Brent D. Glass and Kelly Kress, "Textiles, Part 3: Mill Villages, Labor Disputes, and Twentieth-Century Technologies," in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://www.ncpedia.org/textiles-part-3-mill-villages-labor>.

<sup>45</sup> Glass and Kress, "Textiles, Part 3."

<sup>46</sup> John R. deTreville, "Manufacturing, Part 6: New Industries, Increased Competition, and Diversification in the Modern Era," in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), [https://www.ncpedia.org/manufacturing\\_part\\_6](https://www.ncpedia.org/manufacturing_part_6).

<sup>47</sup> Brent D. Glass and Kelly Kress, "Textiles, Part 4: Decline, Consolidation, and the Future of Textiles in the State," in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://www.ncpedia.org/textiles-part-4-decline>.

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to a dramatic increase in foreign textile imports, resulting in additional mill closures.<sup>48</sup> However, North Carolina still has the largest textile mill industry in the country today.<sup>49</sup>

### Burke County

As in the rest of the South, agriculture remained dominant in Burke County following the Civil War, although it was drastically altered. In 1860, 548 families in Burke County owned farms, while over 900 families in total participated in farming. Over two hundred of those families enslaved a total of 2,372 people.<sup>50</sup> The abolition of slavery, the system upon which agriculture in the South was wholly dependent, resulted in a collapse of the economy. Many people continued to farm, including formerly enslaved persons. However, as one historian notes, this was “only because they had no alternative—there were simply no other occupations open to them.”<sup>51</sup> Land values plummeted; the total value of farmland in Burke County fell from over \$1 million in 1860 to less than \$600,000 in 1870 and only slightly more than \$600,000 by the early 1880s.<sup>52</sup> Combined with the collapse of the Confederate banking system, farmers had difficulty accessing the credit necessary to purchase items like seed, fertilizer, and farm equipment, which were also in scant supply. Farms increased in number but decreased in size; without enslaved labor, larger-scale farms were no longer sustainable, as most farmers did not have the means to mechanize. From 548 farms with an average of 66 acres in Burke County in 1860, the number of farms increased to approximately 880 with an average of 37 acres in 1870 and 1,648 with an average of 27 acres in 1880.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the century, most farmers practiced subsistence farming and produced a small surplus for local sale. As a result, crop production diversified, and money crops were not extensively grown.<sup>54</sup> As Burke County became more industrialized over the twentieth century, farms became more mechanized and grew again in scale. While many people left farming for mills, factories, and other urban work, agriculture continued to be a substantial segment of the economy.<sup>55</sup>

### *Textile Manufacturing in Burke County*

Small-scale textile manufacturing was a major cottage industry in Burke County from the late eighteenth century until industrial-scale manufacturing took over in the late nineteenth century. Before their arrival in North Carolina, the Scotch-Irish had been heavily involved in the wool trade in Ireland; weaving was also a customary occupation for the German and English in Europe. Clothmaking became a traditional

<sup>48</sup> Glass and Kress, “Textiles, Part 4.”

<sup>49</sup> “Key Industries in North Carolina,” North Carolina Department of Commerce, State of North Carolina, accessed Mar. 31, 2023, <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/business/key-industries-north-carolina>.

<sup>50</sup> Edward W. Phifer Jr., “Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County, North Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 2 (May 1962): 141, 163.

<sup>51</sup> Phifer, “Burke County,” 81.

<sup>52</sup> Phifer, “Burke County,” 81.

<sup>53</sup> Phifer, “Burke County,” 81.

<sup>54</sup> Phifer, “Burke County,” 82-83.

<sup>55</sup> Phifer, “Burke County,” 83.

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role for early colonial homemakers, and it evolved into one of the main tasks imposed on enslaved women on plantation labor camps.<sup>56</sup> Most homes contained hand cards for processing raw material, spinning wheels to produce yarn, and looms to weave cloth.<sup>57</sup> While cotton cloth production dominated northern industrial mills during this period, Burke County did not grow a large amount of cotton nor was it connected to the major cotton trade networks at this time; while some cotton cloth was manufactured, most was made from wool or flax.<sup>58</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the textile cottage industry in Burke County transformed into a large-scale industrial economy as numerous textile companies formed and opened large mill complexes. The first large-scale textile mill in Burke County, Dunavant Cotton Manufacturing Company, was organized in 1888 and opened its first mill facility in Morganton the following year. In 1895, the mill changed ownership and the company name changed to Alpine Cotton Mill.<sup>59</sup> This mill produced coarse cotton thread from the time it opened in 1889 until it closed in 1949, when the Drexel Furniture Company purchased the mill and converted it to furniture-making operations.<sup>60</sup> The Henry River Manufacturing Company, organized in 1905, produced fine cotton yarns until the mill closed in 1970. Henry River constructed a mill company village to the south of Hildebran in eastern Burke County, which contained not only the mill facilities, but also a company store, boarding house, and worker houses.<sup>61</sup> The Drexel Knitting Mill, which manufactured men's hosiery, began operations in 1909 in the town of Drexel.<sup>62</sup> In 1914, the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company opened on the Catawba River in eastern Burke County, and the Icard Cordage Company, which manufactured cotton braided window sash cord and clothesline, opened in Icard.<sup>63</sup> Vaudois Hosiery Mill formed in Morganton in 1913-1914. In 1917, Liberty Hosiery Mill opened in High Peak and continued operations until 1939.<sup>64</sup> Garrou Knitting Mills opened

<sup>56</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 77.

<sup>57</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 77.

<sup>58</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 77.

<sup>59</sup> The Dunavant Cotton Manufacturing Company, located at 109 East Fleming Drive in Morganton, is still extant. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013. Sybil H. Argintar, "Dunavant Cotton Manufacturing Company," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, December 5, 2012), 8:10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Argintar, "Dunavant," 8:16.

<sup>61</sup> The Henry River Mill Village, located at 4216-4283 Henry River Road in Hildebran, retains the company store and twenty worker houses; the mill facilities are no longer extant. The village was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019. Clay Griffith, "Henry River Mill Village Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, May 9, 2019), 7:4-5, 8:27.

<sup>62</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 90-91.

<sup>63</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 92.

<sup>64</sup> Argintar, "Dunavant," 8:13-14.

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in 1917 in Morganton; it merged with Morganton Full Fashioned Hosiery in 1926 and continued operations into the 1990s.<sup>65</sup>

By 1960, Burke County had a total of twenty-five textile mills, far more than any other county in western North Carolina. Buncombe and McDowell counties, which contained the second most textile mills, trailed behind with only twelve mills each.<sup>66</sup>

### *Other Industries in Burke County*

A number of small-scale gristmills, distilleries, tanyards, iron ore mines, and ironworks were established in Burke County by the turn of the eighteenth century, but large-scale industrial production did not take place in Burke County until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Gristmills in Burke County began using steam power in the 1890s, which revolutionized the industry. While most earlier mills ground small amounts of grain as a custom service for individuals, steam power increased production ability and mills began making their own meal and flour for market.<sup>68</sup> Sawmills began appearing in the county in the 1870s as the railroad network expanded, but they proliferated in the 1890s when the introduction of steam power allowed them to move away from water networks and closer to rail tracks.<sup>69</sup> The Burke Tannery, established in Morganton in 1895, was one of the county's earliest significant large-scale manufacturers and continued production until 1948.<sup>70</sup>

With abundant forests in the region, woodworkers and cabinet makers had worked in Burke County since the late eighteenth century, but woodworking production was slow to industrialize in the region. Many home woodshops were still in production into the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> Morganton Furniture Manufacturing Company, established in Morganton in 1885, was the first large-scale endeavor in Burke County; however, it was destroyed completely by fire two years later, and no other major companies formed until the early twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> The Drexel Furniture Company, which became one of the largest furniture manufacturers in Burke County in the twentieth century, was established in Morganton in 1903.<sup>73</sup> Other major furniture manufacturers in Burke County included the Morganton Furniture

<sup>65</sup> The Garrou—Morganton Fully-Fashioned Hosiery Mills, located at 101 & 105 Lenoir Street in Morganton, is still extant. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. Kim N. Woolard, "Garrou—Morganton Fully-Fashioned Hosiery Mills," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, January 27, 1999): 8:1.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Clark, "WNC Textile Payroll Totals \$89 Million Yearly," *Asheville Citizen-Times* (Asheville, North Carolina), Jan. 31, 1960, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 77-79.

<sup>68</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 84.

<sup>69</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 86.

<sup>70</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 86.

<sup>71</sup> Phifer, "Burke County," 86-87.

<sup>72</sup> Phifer, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Phifer, 87.

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Company, established in 1904 and acquired by the Drexel Furniture Company in 1957, and the Morganton Manufacturing Company, established in 1921 and acquired by the Drexel Furniture Company in 1951.<sup>74</sup> The Drexel Furniture Company still exists today as a subsidiary of Lenoir Empire Furniture.<sup>75</sup>

### Valdese

Valdese is unique in the context of the South in that it was colonized nearly three decades after the close of the Civil War by European immigrants with no ties to the Confederacy or its agricultural economy dependent on enslaved labor. However, the Waldenses experienced a similar trajectory as the surrounding South from a primarily agricultural economy to an industrial one. During the difficult early years of the colony, some residents left Valdese and found work in the burgeoning mill operations throughout the South as well as in the North.<sup>76</sup> Some later returned to Valdese and started companies of their own, kickstarting the local industrial economy.

### *Textile Manufacturing in Valdese*

John and Francis Garrou and Antoine Grill were among the early migrants to leave Valdese in search of work. They landed in hosiery mills in Manning, South Carolina, where they learned the textile mill trade. In 1901, they returned to Valdese and opened the Waldensian Hosiery Mill, marking the first industrial venture undertaken by the Waldenses.<sup>77</sup> Located along the railroad tracks at the bottom of Colombo Street SW, the mill initially employed fewer than twenty workers. Like farming in the early years of the colony, the early days of operating the mill were difficult. Francis Garrou and Antoine Grill were forced to sell their shares of the business and find work elsewhere to pay down debts incurred with constructing and opening the mill.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the business began to grow. It incorporated in 1914, and by 1925 employed approximately one hundred workers who handled 225,000 pounds of raw cotton annually.<sup>79</sup>

The Waldensian Hosiery Mill introduced the Waldenses to large-scale industry. Additional mills opened over the next several decades, including the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill (subject property). The Valdese Manufacturing Company, which owned the Waldensian Swiss

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<sup>74</sup> Phifer, 87-88.

<sup>75</sup> “Drexel Furniture,” Lenoir Empire Furniture, accessed Mar. 31, 2023, <https://www.lenoirempirefurniture.com/drexel-heritage-furniture.inc>.

<sup>76</sup> Watts, 114.

<sup>77</sup> The Waldensian Hosiery Mill complex (1901 with later additions) is located at 309 Colombo Street SW. It is extant, but not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Waldensian Hosiery Mill also operated a plant at a mill constructed in 1926 for the former Statesville Shoe Manufacturing Company; located at 408 Pineburr Avenue SE and known as the Pine Burr Mill during its time as a Waldensian Hosiery Mill plant, it is still extant, but not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Watts, 152.

Watts, 134.

<sup>78</sup> Watts, 155.

<sup>79</sup> “Waldensians Develop Section of N. Carolina,” *Watauga Democrat* (Boone, NC), Jan. 8, 1925, 2.

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Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill for a short time in 1924, incorporated in 1913 as a subsidiary of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill and produced hosiery yarn.<sup>80</sup> The Banner Knitting Mills also began operations in 1913 and reorganized as the Martinat Hosiery Mills in 1920; it produced seamless half hose and women's cuff-top hose.<sup>81</sup> The Pauline Knitting Mill, organized in 1920, produced mercerized women's hosiery. In the late 1920s, the company dissolved and merged with the Waldensian Hosiery Mill business.<sup>82</sup> In 1928, Pilot Full Fashion Mills formed and constructed a mill complex directly to the east of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill, where it produced women's hosiery and undergarments.<sup>83</sup>

By the early 1940s, Pilot Full Fashion Mills was the largest textile mill in Valdese with 750 operatives producing hosiery and other undergarments.<sup>84</sup> In 1955, it reorganized as the Alba Hosiery Mills, and in 1961, it merged with the Waldensian Hosiery Mill to form Alba-Waldensian, Inc. Alba-Waldensian continued to produce stretch knit undergarments and expanded to produce medical products such as flexible bandages and wound dressings.<sup>85</sup> In the 1970s, Alba-Waldensian moved from the original Waldensian Hosiery Mill and Pilot Full Fashion Mills complexes, but it is still in operation today at the western outskirts of Valdese.<sup>86</sup>

Later mills in Valdese included Francis-Louise Full Fashion Mills, established in 1938, which produced women's hosiery; Dolly Hosiery Mill, established in 1939, which produced infants' and children's hosiery; Burkeyarns, Inc., established in 1948, which produced synthetic yarns; Orton Hosiery Mill, established in 1953, which produced infants' and women's socks; and Robinson Hosiery Mill, established in 1956, which produced infants' and women's cotton hose.<sup>87</sup> Robinson Hosiery Mill is still in operation today.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The Valdese Manufacturing Complex (1913 with later additions) is located at 312 Colombo Street SW, directly to the west of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill complex. It is extant, but not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Watts, 142-143.; Audrey Thomas, "Valdese Survey and Study List: Staff Review," presentation at the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources National Register Advisory Committee Meeting, Raleigh, North Carolina, October 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Watts, 143.

<sup>82</sup> The Pauline Knitting Mill (1920) is located at 409 Morgan Street SE. It is extant, but not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Watts, 155.

<sup>83</sup> The Pilot Full Fashion Mills complex (1928 with later additions) is located at 408 Praley Street SW. It is extant, but not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Watts, 155.

<sup>84</sup> Watts, 155.

<sup>85</sup> "Alba-Waldensian, Inc," International Directory of Company Histories, Encyclopedia.com, revised Mar. 21, 2023, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/books/politics-and-business-magazines/alba-waldensian-inc>.

<sup>86</sup> "New Life for Old Building," *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), May 18, 2008, 2V.

<sup>87</sup> Clark, "WNC Textile Payroll Totals \$89 Million Yearly."

<sup>88</sup> Thomas.

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By the 1950s, Valdese was one of the largest textile centers in the region and employed approximately half of all hosiery workers in Burke County.<sup>89</sup>

### *Other Industries in Valdese*

While none matched the scale of the textile industry, other industries were established in Valdese. The Waldensian Bakery, established in 1915 by John P. Rostan and Philip Ghigo, was one of the earliest major non-textile endeavors.<sup>90</sup> The original building and oven was constructed at the corner of Colombo Street and Main Street W (no longer extant). Rostan and Ghigo suspended business during World War I, but reopened following the war. In 1929, a new bakery was constructed.<sup>91</sup> The company was sold in the 1980s and is currently owned by Bimbo Bakeries, the largest commercial baking company in the United States.<sup>92</sup> Bimbo Bakeries currently operates from the expanded 1929 building. Crestline Furniture Company, established in 1956 by Henry Barus, joined the rapidly expanding furniture industry in Burke County and North Carolina and is still in operation today.<sup>93</sup>

## **Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill**

### Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company, 1915 – 1924

The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company, incorporated in 1915, was one of the earlier textile mills founded in Valdese in the early nineteenth century. It was also the first and only textile mill in Valdese to manufacture lace and embroidery products. In 1914, founding members Henry Clot and Philippe Bounous traveled to Valdese from the New York City area to establish the mill.<sup>94</sup> Having worked at an embroidery mill in Hoboken, New Jersey, Clot decided to bring lace and embroidery manufacturing to Valdese, creating what Valdese mayor Francis Garrou claimed was “the only [mill] of the kind south of New Jersey.”<sup>95</sup> Clot and Bounous purchased two plots of land on Praley Street from the trustees of the Waldensian church and raised \$125,000 of capital stock at \$50 a share to fund the mill.<sup>96</sup> In 1915, they commissioned the construction of the initial tri-gabled brick and stone mill building, which they outfitted with three embroidery machines and additional accessory machines. Production began that same year.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas.

<sup>90</sup> Watts, 146.

<sup>91</sup> The Waldensian Bakery building (1929), located at 320 Main Street E, is still extant. It is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Watts, 146.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas.

<sup>93</sup> Phifer, 88.

<sup>94</sup> Watts, 147.

<sup>95</sup> “Valdese Represented at Charlotte Exposition,” *News-Herald* (Valdese, NC), Sept. 22, 1921, 4.; “Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only Industry of its Kind in South,” *Charlotte Observer Burke County Special* (Charlotte, NC), May 13, 1920, 22.

<sup>96</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years* (Valdese, North Carolina: Valdese Weavers, LLC: 2015), 32.; “New Enterprises,” *Greenville News* (Greenville, SC), May 23, 1915, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Watts, 147.

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By 1919, the mill employed approximately thirty-five operatives and produced approximately 400,000 stitches per week. That year, the mill expanded with an additional embroidery machine.<sup>98</sup> By early 1920, Clot and Bounous planned an expansion of the mill building that more than doubled its footprint.<sup>99</sup> Construction completed that spring, but the mill remained with four embroidery machines and an output of approximately 500,000 stitches per week.<sup>100</sup> The following year, the company's growth and success was recognized at the "Made in N.C. Exposition" in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company was one of several Valdese mills represented at the exhibition; the others included the Waldensian Hosiery Mills, the Valdese Manufacturing Company, and the Waldensian Bakery.<sup>101</sup> The mill's lace, according to the newspaper coverage of the exhibition, was "made of the finest illusion with a rich pattern on the border."<sup>102</sup> By 1924, however, lace and embroidery products fell out of favor, the company closed, and the Valdese Manufacturing Company assumed control of the property.<sup>103</sup>

#### *Henry Clot and Philippe Bounous*

Like the original residents of Valdese, Henry Clot and Philippe Bounous were Waldensian immigrants from northern Italy. According to census data, Clot arrived in the United States in 1910, but it is unclear if he traveled to Valdese initially and left for New York before returning or if he stayed in New York upon his arrival to the country.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, he traveled to New York City to find work as a draftsman; finding no jobs, he traveled to Hoboken, New Jersey where he began work at an embroidery mill and eventually became superintendent. Like the founders of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill, Clot decided to bring his knowledge of the textile industry to Valdese and start a mill.<sup>105</sup> Clot was a hands-on mill manager; he drafted embroidery patterns himself and fixed machinery when issues arose.<sup>106</sup> Philippe Bounous arrived in the United States with his father and two siblings. It is unknown when the Bounous family traveled to Valdese, but by 1920, Philippe lived in Valdese with his father, two siblings, sister-in-law, niece, and nephew.<sup>107</sup> It is also unknown when Philippe met Henry Clot; they presumably met while both working in the New York City area.

<sup>98</sup> Watts, 147.

<sup>99</sup> "Brief News Items from Over Burke: Valdese," *News-Herald* (Valdese, NC), Jan. 29, 1920, 1, 3.

<sup>100</sup> "Brief News Items from Over Burke: Valdese," *News-Herald* (Valdese, NC), Mar. 3, 1921, 1.

<sup>101</sup> "Valdese Represented at Charlotte Exposition."

<sup>102</sup> "Valdese Represented at Charlotte Exposition."

<sup>103</sup> Watts, 147.; *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census, Lovelady, Burke, North Carolina (Roll T625\_1287, Page 25B, Enumeration District 15), Ancestry.com.; "Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only Industry of its Kind in South."

<sup>105</sup> "Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only Industry of its Kind in South."

<sup>106</sup> "Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only Industry of its Kind in South."

<sup>107</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census, Lovelady, Burke, North Carolina (Roll T625\_1287, Page 22A, Enumeration District 15), Ancestry.com.

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### Valdese Manufacturing Company, 1924

The Valdese Manufacturing Company held ownership of the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers Inc., Mill for less than a year; it appears to have been a holdover solution until a new, dedicated company could be formed. In December 1924, the Valdese Manufacturing Company transferred ownership of the mill to Waldensian Weavers, Inc., whose initial investors included Valdese Manufacturing Company investors and executives.<sup>108</sup>

The Valdese Manufacturing Company was incorporated in December 1913 as a spinning mill for hosiery yarn. John Louis Garrou and Francis Garrou, both Valdese residents, were two principal promoters of the company. The company raised funds from Morganton investors, including A. M. Kistler, as well as stockholders of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill, who stood to benefit from a local hosiery yarn supplier. It purchased ten acres of land from the church, and in 1915 the Valdese Manufacturing Company mill, located to the west of the Waldensian Hosiery Mill, completed construction. The building received a large addition in 1920.<sup>109</sup> John Louis Garrou, who had traveled to New England to study textile mill methods, played an integral role in the planning and development of the Valdese Manufacturing Company until his death during the influenza epidemic of 1918. Francis Garrou served as the company's first secretary and treasurer and held executive positions until his death in 1937.<sup>110</sup>

### Waldensian Weavers, Inc. 1924 - 1935

Waldensian Weavers, Inc. incorporated in December 1924 with \$200,000 of paid capital stock and \$600,000 of authorized capital stock. Incorporators included A. M. Kistler, C. A. Spencer, and R. T. Claywell of Morganton and Francis Garrou of Valdese; Francis Garrou and A. M. Kistler were also involved with the Valdese Manufacturing Company.<sup>111</sup> After assuming control of the former Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company mill (subject property), Waldensian Weavers, Inc. constructed another addition in 1925, expanding the building's footprint to the north. This addition provided space to install weaving equipment, and the mill began producing large woven tapestries and furniture upholstery.<sup>112</sup> Waldensian Weavers, Inc. became the only textile mill in Valdese that was not producing apparel products—all other textile mills in Valdese during this period produced either finished hosiery, undergarments, and other related apparel items or yarn for the manufacture of finished apparel goods. It

<sup>108</sup> "Short News Items," *Lincoln County News* (Lincolnton, NC), Dec. 15, 1924, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Watts, 142-143.

<sup>110</sup> Watts, 143.

<sup>111</sup> "Short News Items," *Lincoln County News* (Lincolnton, NC), Dec. 15, 1924, 1.; "Waldensian Weavers, Inc. Are Granted a Charter," *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), Dec. 12, 1924, 1.

<sup>112</sup> "Will Double Equipment," *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), Jun. 21, 1925, 25.

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is assumed that Waldensian Weavers, Inc. made the shift to upholstery fabrics to capitalize on the rapidly growing furniture manufacturing industry in Burke County and North Carolina at this time.<sup>113</sup>

Waldensian Weavers, Inc. experienced slight growth in the early years of the Great Depression. Between 1928 and 1933, the number of looms expanded from 168 to 188.<sup>114</sup> Valdese experienced tremendous population growth during the 1930s as workers and their families moved from the surrounding areas in search of work in the local mills.<sup>115</sup> In 1930, the population stood at just over 1,800; by 1940, the population had expanded to just over 2,600—an increase of nearly forty-five percent.<sup>116</sup> By the mid-1930s, the mill was a significant local employer with around 200 operatives.<sup>117</sup>

In 1934, anger at low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions in textile mills, combined with the general failure of the National Recovery Administration to establish minimum wages and maximum hours and address unemployment during the Great Depression, led workers across the country to participate in what became the largest general strike in United States history.<sup>118</sup> On September 1 of that year, leaders with the national United Textile Workers (UTW) union called for a nationwide strike to begin on Labor Day—Monday, September 3rd. Union workers gathered in cars and trucks, dubbed “flying squadrons,” and traveled across the South to encourage strikers.<sup>119</sup> By the end of that week, a total of approximately 400,000 textile workers had gone on strike, with over 53,000 textile workers joining the strike in North Carolina.<sup>120</sup>

Waldensian Weavers, Inc. was the only mill to go on strike in Burke County. While union membership skyrocketed in the early 1930s, none of the mill operatives throughout Burke County were unionized, including at Waldensian Weavers, Inc., and many workers likely feared losing their jobs.<sup>121</sup> Workers at Waldensian Weavers, Inc. ceased operations starting on September 5.<sup>122</sup> A workers’ committee of

<sup>113</sup> Patricia Phillips Marshall, “Furniture Industry, Part IV: Birth and Development of the Modern Furniture Industry,” in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://www.ncpedia.org/furniture/modern-industry>.

<sup>114</sup> *North Carolina Year Book* (Raleigh, NC: News and Observer, 1933), 87.

<sup>115</sup> Gary D. Hicks, *Population and Economy: Valdese, North Carolina* (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Division of Community Planning, 1967), 4.

<sup>116</sup> Hicks, 5.

<sup>117</sup> “Textile Strike Situation Quiet in Burke County,” *Asheville Citizen-Times* (Asheville, NC), Sep. 21, 1934, 9.

<sup>118</sup> B. J. Davis, “Textile Strike of 1934,” in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://ncpedia.org/textiles/strike-1934>. Beth English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>119</sup> Davis.

<sup>120</sup> Davis, “100 Mills Closed,” *Greenville News* (Greenville, SC), Sep. 5, 1934, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Davis, “Squadron Reported on Move in Burke,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), Sep. 8, 1934, 3.

<sup>122</sup> “One Plant Closes,” *Greenville News* (Greenville, SC), Sep. 5, 1934, 2.

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Waldensian Weavers operatives requested a shutdown, citing concerns about the flying squadrons, outside picketers, and potential violence, and issued a statement that read, “We are not striking, but we desire to prevent any disorder.”<sup>123</sup> Days later, however, they had officially joined the strike. On September 13, workers attempted to prevent a shipment of yarn from entering the mill, blockading the driveway until company executives enlisted the sheriff and police chief to disperse them.<sup>124</sup> The workers still refused to return to work and effectively shut down the mill for the entire three-week duration of the strike. Newspapers commented that all other mills in Burke County were running full time, with many “working both night and day shifts, considerably more time than prior to the strike.”<sup>125</sup>

The strike ultimately failed. Although then-President Roosevelt assigned a small board to resolve differences between the UTW and the mill companies, it only generally acknowledged worker grievances and called for further study, with no recommendations to raise wages or improve working conditions. The UTW, worried that they would lose future federal support, complied with the board’s recommendations and ordered an end to the strike.<sup>126</sup> In the North, where unions were stronger and more plentiful and state laws protecting workers’ rights were stricter, workers saw minor improvements from the strike. In the South, workers saw little to no change.<sup>127</sup>

In May of 1935, faced with the difficulties of the Great Depression, Waldensian Weavers, Inc. fell into default and the mill entered into receivership. The Shuford Mills Group, based in Hickory, North Carolina purchased the mill later that year.<sup>128</sup>

#### Valdese Weaving Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc., 1935 – 1974

The Valdese Weaving Company incorporated in September of 1935 as a subsidiary of the Shuford Mills Group, based in Hickory, North Carolina and headed by A. A. Shuford. The Shuford Mills Group owned several textile mills in nearby Hickory and Granite Falls, including the Shuford Mill Company, the Highland Cordage Company, the Granite Falls Manufacturing Company, and the Granite Cordage Company.<sup>129</sup> The Valdese Weaving Company continued to produce woven and spun draperies and upholstering goods, which were primarily sold to “the fast-growing furniture and textiles manufacturing

<sup>123</sup> “One Plant Closes,” *Greenville News* (Greenville, SC), Sep. 5, 1934, 2.

<sup>124</sup> “Block Entrance Until Dispersed by Officers,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), Sep. 13, 1934, 11.

<sup>125</sup> “Textile Strike Situation Quiet in Burke County,” *Asheville Citizen-Times* (Asheville, NC), Sep. 21, 1934, 9.

<sup>126</sup> Davis, Brent D. Glass and Wiley J. Williams, “Labor Unions, Part 3: The General Strike of 1934 and the Battle for Union Leadership,” in *Encyclopedia of Northern Carolina*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), <https://ncpedia.org/labor-unions-part-3-general-strike>.

<sup>127</sup> Davis.

<sup>128</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 32.; “Hickory Firm Buys Valdese Factory,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), Aug. 8, 1935, 11.

<sup>129</sup> “The Shuford Group of Mills: Several Large Plants in Hickory and Nearby Operated by A.A. Shuford, Jr.,” *Hickory Daily Record: Catawba County Special* (Hickory, North Carolina), Jun. 12, 1920, 15.

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trades in the North Carolina Piedmont and foothills.”<sup>130</sup> However, the company also retooled the mill and constructed a number of additions to house picking, dyeing, slashing, and spinning departments in order to make the mill entirely self-sustaining and less at the mercy of an uncertain supply chain. With these expanded facilities, the mill took charge of the entire cotton manufacturing process, save for growing the material, from opening bales of raw cotton to shipping out finished yarn or fabric.<sup>131</sup>

In 1941, A. A. Shuford’s grandson Harley Shuford became president of the company, with Roy D. Boggs as vice president. In 1946, the company changed its name to Valdese Weavers, Inc. and began focusing production on woven jacquard upholstery fabrics, which have designs or motifs woven directly into the construction of the weave rather than printed or dyed onto the surface. The company expanded the building once again to accommodate extra equipment for increased capacity.<sup>132</sup> Shuford Mills continued to expand with the establishment of Century Furniture in 1947 and the acquisition of Longview Furniture Company in 1957, both located in Hickory.<sup>133</sup> While Valdese Weavers, Inc. continued to be the only manufacturer in Valdese to target the local furniture industry, the inclusion of both textile and furniture manufacturing companies under the same parent company demonstrates the connection between the two industries in North Carolina during the twentieth century.<sup>134</sup>

As Harley Shuford became more involved with Century Furniture and the Longview Furniture Company, Roy D. Boggs took over as president of Valdese Weavers, Inc. in 1954.<sup>135</sup> The company continued to enjoy steady growth and stability, and by 1960, 355 employees manufactured \$9 million worth of product annually.<sup>136</sup> In the early 1970s, the company determined that it had outgrown the subject property and elected to construct a new, modern, single-story facility on the eastern outskirts of Valdese; in 1974, the company moved to the new building and vacated the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill property.<sup>137</sup>

In 1980, Valdese Weavers, Inc. sold the property to Silver Knit Industries, Inc., a textile company based in nearby High Point, which operated from the building until the company was sold in 1983.<sup>138</sup> In 1986,

<sup>130</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 32.

<sup>131</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 26, 32.

<sup>132</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 26, 34.

<sup>133</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 36.; “One Family. 800 Members. 76 Years and Counting,” Century Furniture, accessed Mar. 31, 2023, <https://www.centuryfurniture.com/past-and-present.aspx>.

<sup>134</sup> Clark, “WNC Textile Payroll Totals \$89 Million Yearly.”

<sup>135</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 36.

<sup>136</sup> Clark, “WNC Textile Payroll Totals \$89 Million Yearly.”

<sup>137</sup> The new Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill facility is located at 1000 Perkins Road SE. When it opened in 1974, it contained 27,000 square feet; the plant has since expanded multiple times and now contains approximately 450,000 square feet. It is still in operation as the Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill today. *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 36.

<sup>138</sup> Valdese Weavers, Inc. to Silver Knit Industries, Inc., Burke County, North Carolina, August 25, 1980, Land records volume 592 page 38.; “Edward S. Silver,” *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), Dec. 5, 2010, 35.

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Valdese-based textile company Alba-Waldensian, Inc. purchased the property from Silver Knit Industries, Inc.<sup>139</sup> It is unknown if or for how long Alba-Waldensian operated from the building, but the company owned the property until 1995.<sup>140</sup> Most recently, the building served as offices for an interior design company. The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill currently (2023) sits vacant.

Valdese Weavers, Inc. is still in production today and continues to manufacture woven upholstery fabric, as well as drapery and bedding.<sup>141</sup> Along with Alba-Waldensian, Inc., it is one of the two largest textile companies with early-nineteenth century roots still located in Valdese.

## Conclusion

The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill is locally significant as an early and continuous contributor to the industrial economy and textile industry that evolved in Valdese during the early to mid-twentieth century. Beginning as a new, largely agrarian immigrant colony in the 1890s, Valdese grew into a major textile manufacturing center within Burke County by the 1920s and continued to dominate the industrial economy through the mid-twentieth century. The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill is also significant as the only mill in Valdese to target the local furniture manufacturing industry in Burke County and North Carolina. Alterations to the building since the period of significance are largely confined to the infilling of window openings; however, the original fenestration patterns are still clear and apparent. The Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill retains sufficient integrity and clearly communicates its historic function and significance under Criterion A: INDUSTRY.

<sup>139</sup> Silver Knit Industries, Inc. to Alba-Waldensian, Inc., Burke County, North Carolina, November 10, 1986, Land records volume 715 page 379.

<sup>140</sup> Alba-Waldensian, Inc. to James F. Roebuck and Judy R. Roebuck, Burke County, North Carolina, September 11, 1995, Land records volume 849 page 1036.

<sup>141</sup> *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 69.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** BK0280

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 1.15

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.743894 | Longitude: -81.566159 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register boundary of the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company — Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill is illustrated by the heavy dashed line on the accompanying “National Register of Historic Places Boundary Map.” The boundary encompasses approximately 1.15 acres and overlaps tax parcel #31001 (PIN# 2733-85-6501). The National Register boundary follows the current tax parcel boundary on the north and east, extends 10 feet south of the southeast corner of the tax parcel before turning and running 220 feet west, then turns and runs 102 feet north along the line where the concrete block retaining wall and building meet the paved lot to the west, then turns and runs 16 feet east along the line where the building meets the paved lot, then turns and runs north along the line where the grass meets the paved lot back to meet the north line of the tax parcel. Included within the historic boundary is the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company — Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill building, constructed in phases between 1915 and the early 1970s.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic boundary encompasses approximately 1.15 acres, which includes the acreage and building historically associated with operations at the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company — Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill during the period of significance (1915-1974). The current tax parcel also includes a paved lot to the west of the building, bordered on the west by Waldo Street. This area formerly contained buildings (no longer extant) and during the period of significance was not associated with the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company — Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill. Therefore, it is excluded from the historic boundary. The historic boundary extends beyond the current tax parcel boundary to the south to encompass

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attached portions of the building along the south elevation that extend beyond the current tax parcel boundary.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Rachel Alison; Kate Singleton, MPA; Charlotte Adams, MA  
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street & number: 2506 Little John Lane  
city or town: Austin state: TX zip code: 78704  
e-mail rachel@post oakpreservation.com  
telephone: 210-580-6329  
date: April 2023

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers, Inc. Mill

City or Vicinity: Valdese

County: Burke

State: North Carolina

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Photographer: Charlotte Adams

Date Photographed: March 2019

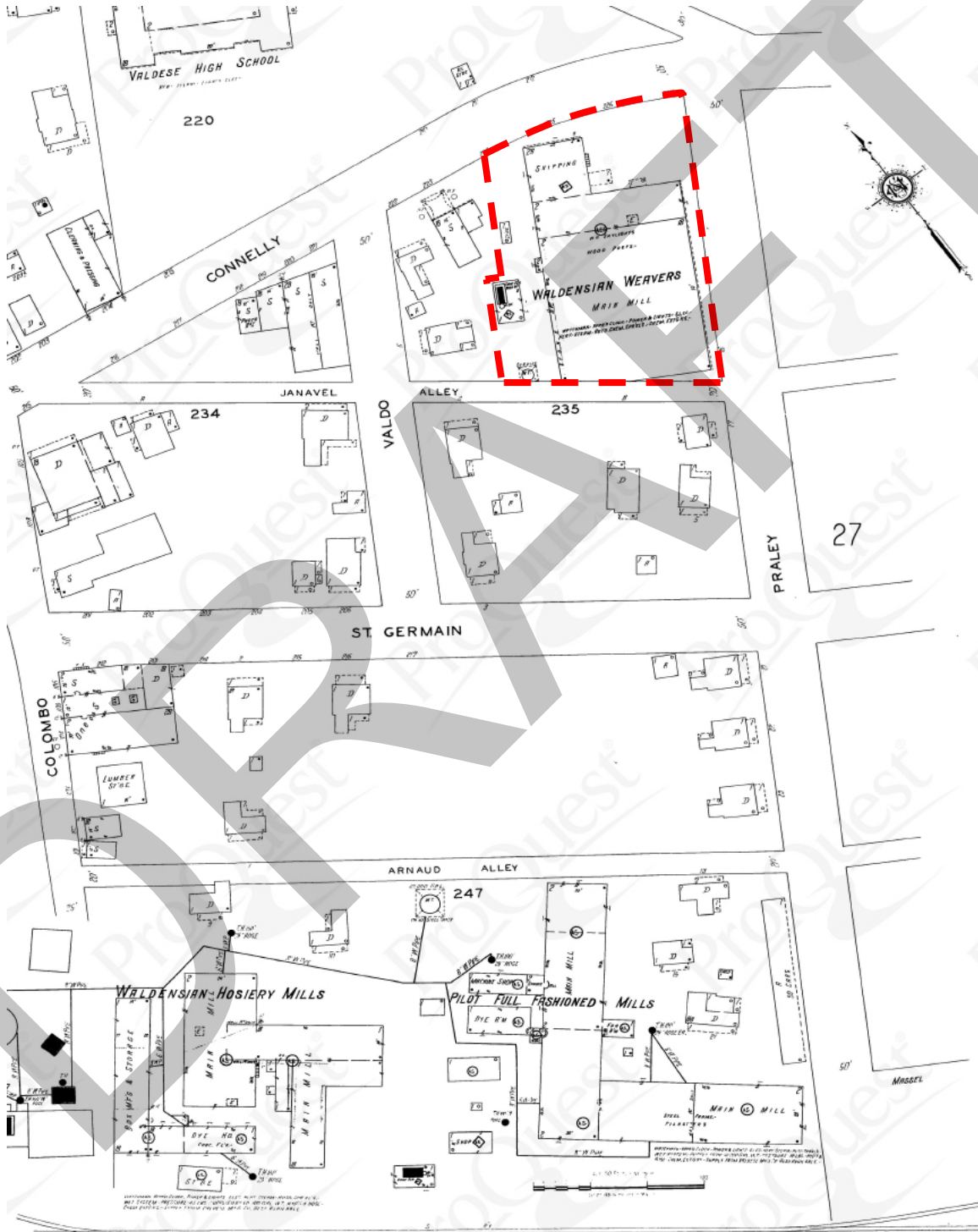
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 01 of 14.** East and north elevations, view SW.
- 02 of 14.** East elevation, view SW.
- 03 of 14.** East elevation, view W.
- 04 of 14.** North elevation, view SE.
- 05 of 14.** West elevation, view E.
- 06 of 14.** South elevation, view NE.
- 07 of 14.** Upper level, 1915 building and c. 1920 addition, view SW.
- 08 of 14.** Upper level, c. 1925 and c. 1941 additions, view SE.
- 09 of 14.** Upper level, c. 1925 addition, view NE.
- 10 of 14.** Mid-level, c. 1920 addition, view NW.
- 11 of 14.** Mid-level, c. 1925 and c. 1941 additions, view SW.
- 12 of 14.** Mid-level, c. 1950s addition, view NE.
- 13 of 14.** Mid-level, c. 1935 and c. 1960s additions, view SW.
- 14 of 14.** Lower level, c. 1925 addition.

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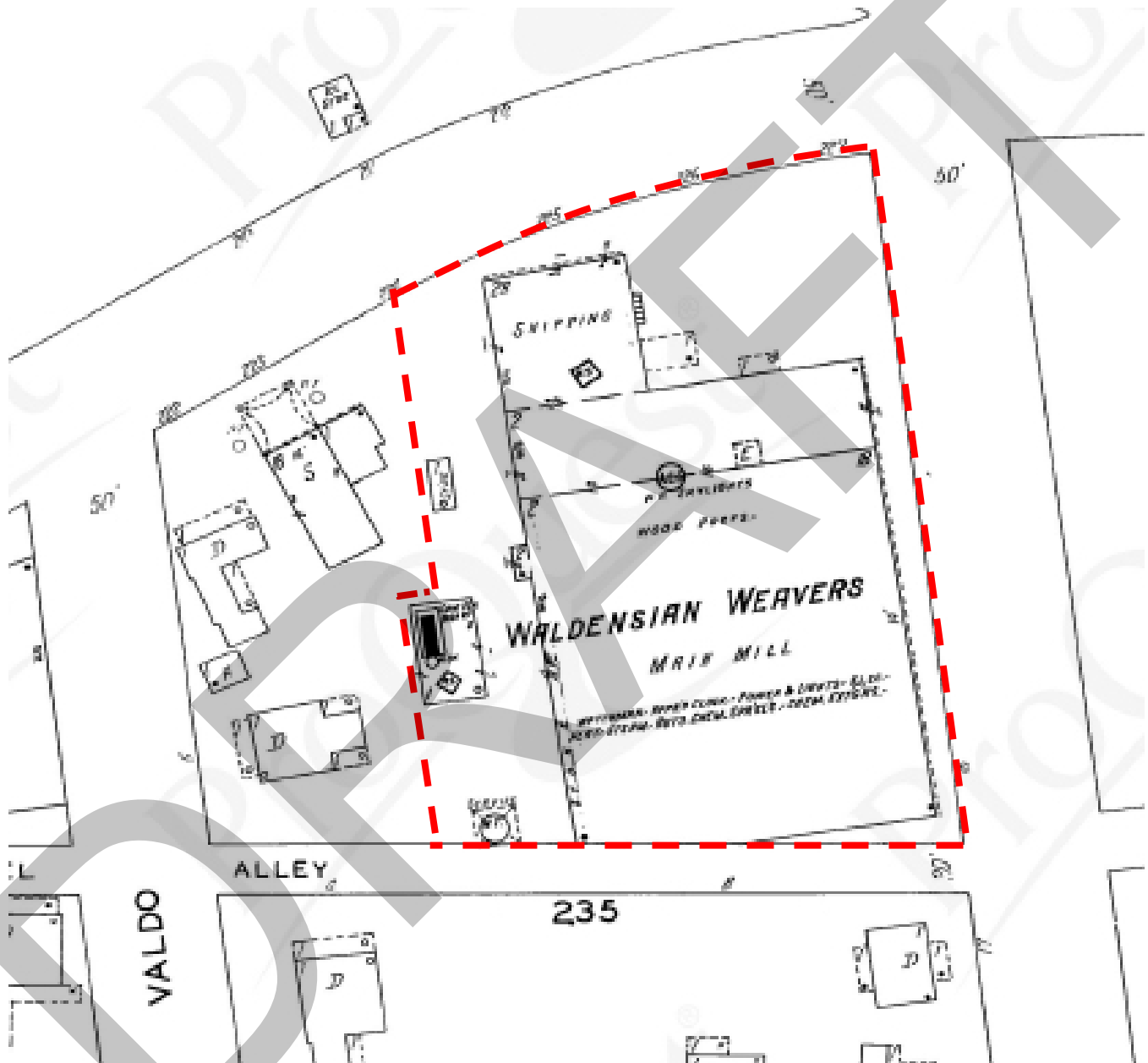
**Figure 1.** 1931 Sanborn Map showing the subject property. Dashed bold line represents the historic boundary. Note the Waldensian-Hosiery Mills and Pilot Full Fashioned Mills to the south.



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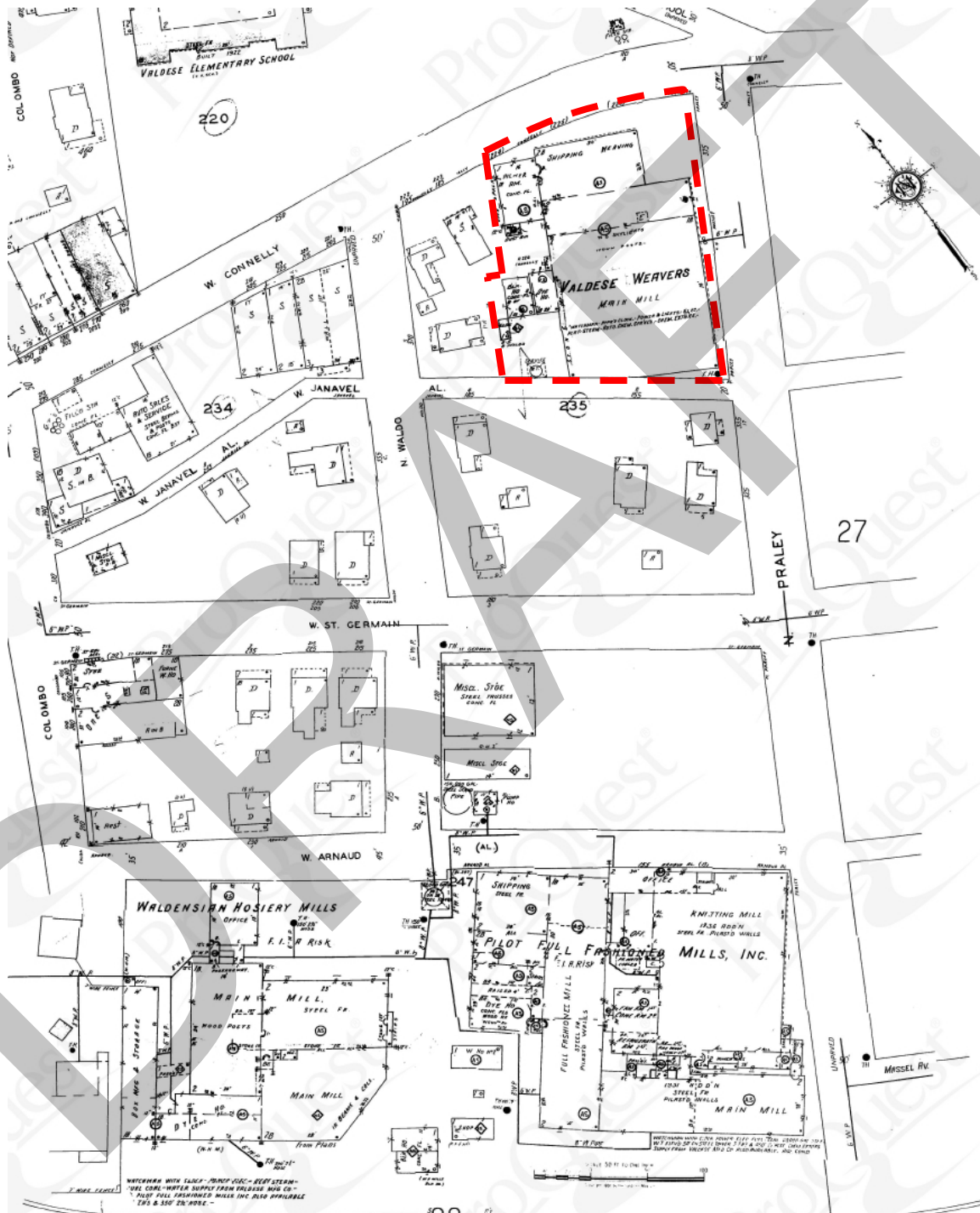
**Figure 2.** 1931 Sanborn Map, enlarged. Dashed bold line represents the historic boundary. Note the dwellings and commercial building to the west of the subject building, outside the historic boundary.



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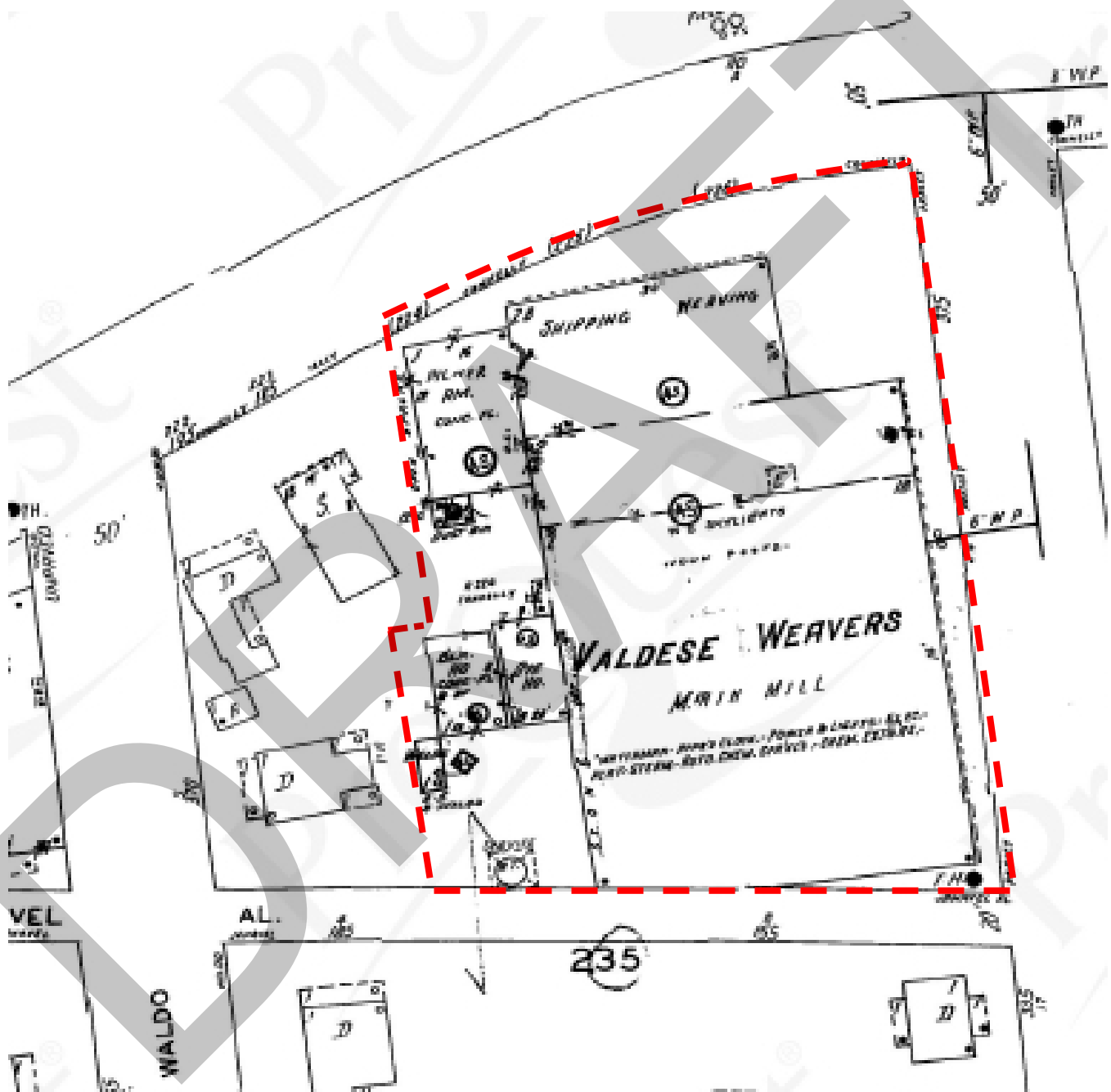
**Figure 3.** 1950 Sanborn Map showing the subject property. Dashed bold line represents the historic boundary.



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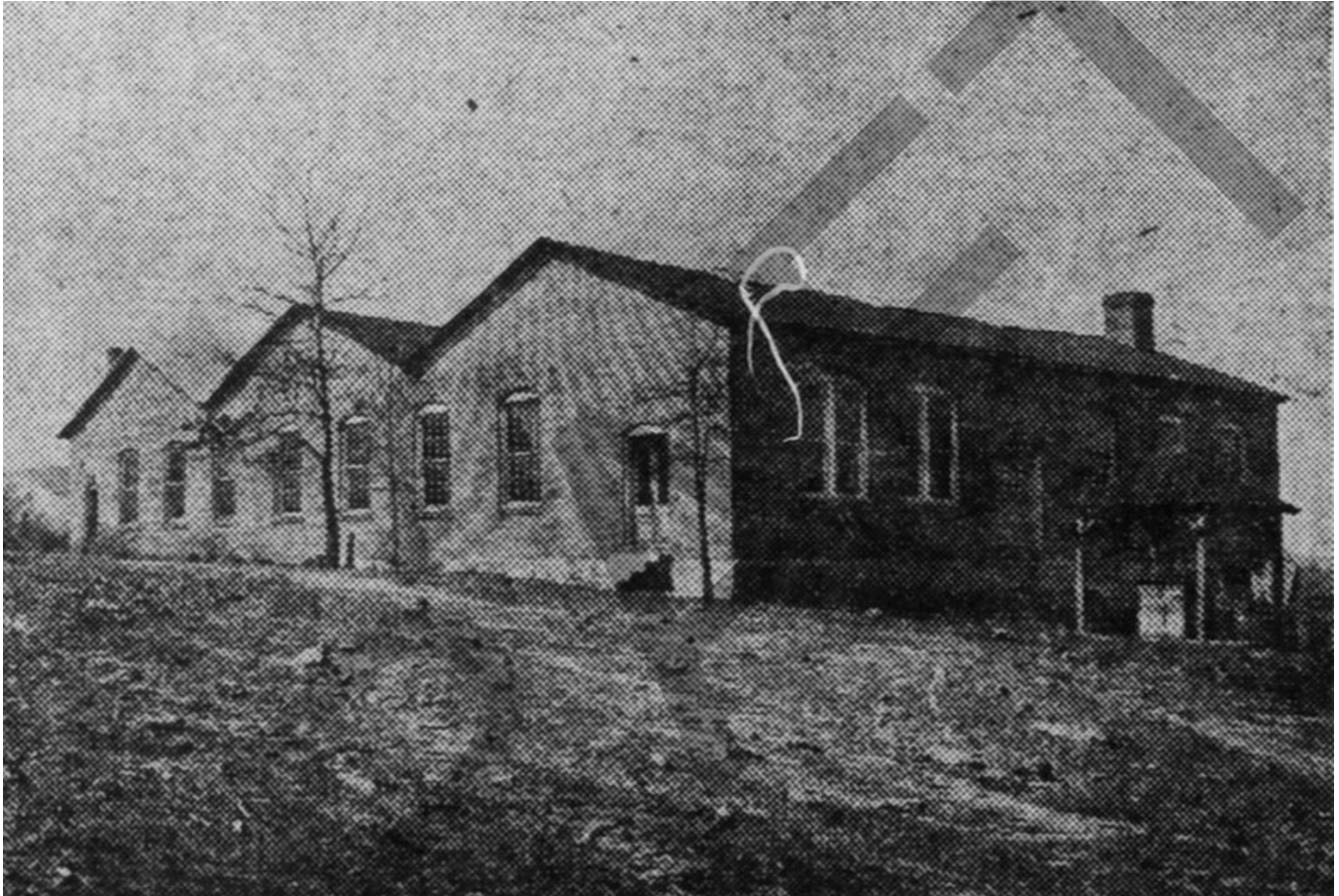
**Figure 4.** 1950 Sanborn Map, enlarged. Dashed bold line represents the historic boundary. Since the 1931 Sanborn, note the weaving addition at the north of the building and the picker room, dye house, and welding shop additions at the west of the building.



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**Figure 5.** C. 1920. Original 1915 building. Photographer is standing on Praley Street facing southwest.  
Source: “Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only One of Its Kind in the South,” *News-Herald* (Valdese, North Carolina), May 13, 1920, 18.



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**Figure 6.** C. 1920. Workers at the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company. Source: “Swiss Embroidery Mill—Only One of Its Kind in the South,” *News-Herald* (Valdese, North Carolina), May 13, 1920, 18.



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**Figure 7.** C. late 1920s. Workers at the Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company. Source: Waldensian Heritage Museum.



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**Figure 8.** C. 1935. Photographer is facing southwest, showing the c. 1925 L-shaped addition. Source: *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years* (Valdese Weavers, LLC: 2015), <https://vimeo.com/148522537>.



View of the plant of the Valdese Weaving Company, one of the many fine industrial plants located at Valdese.

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**Figure 9.** C. 1935. Arrow points to the subject property. Photographer is facing northeast. Source: Waldensian Heritage Museum.



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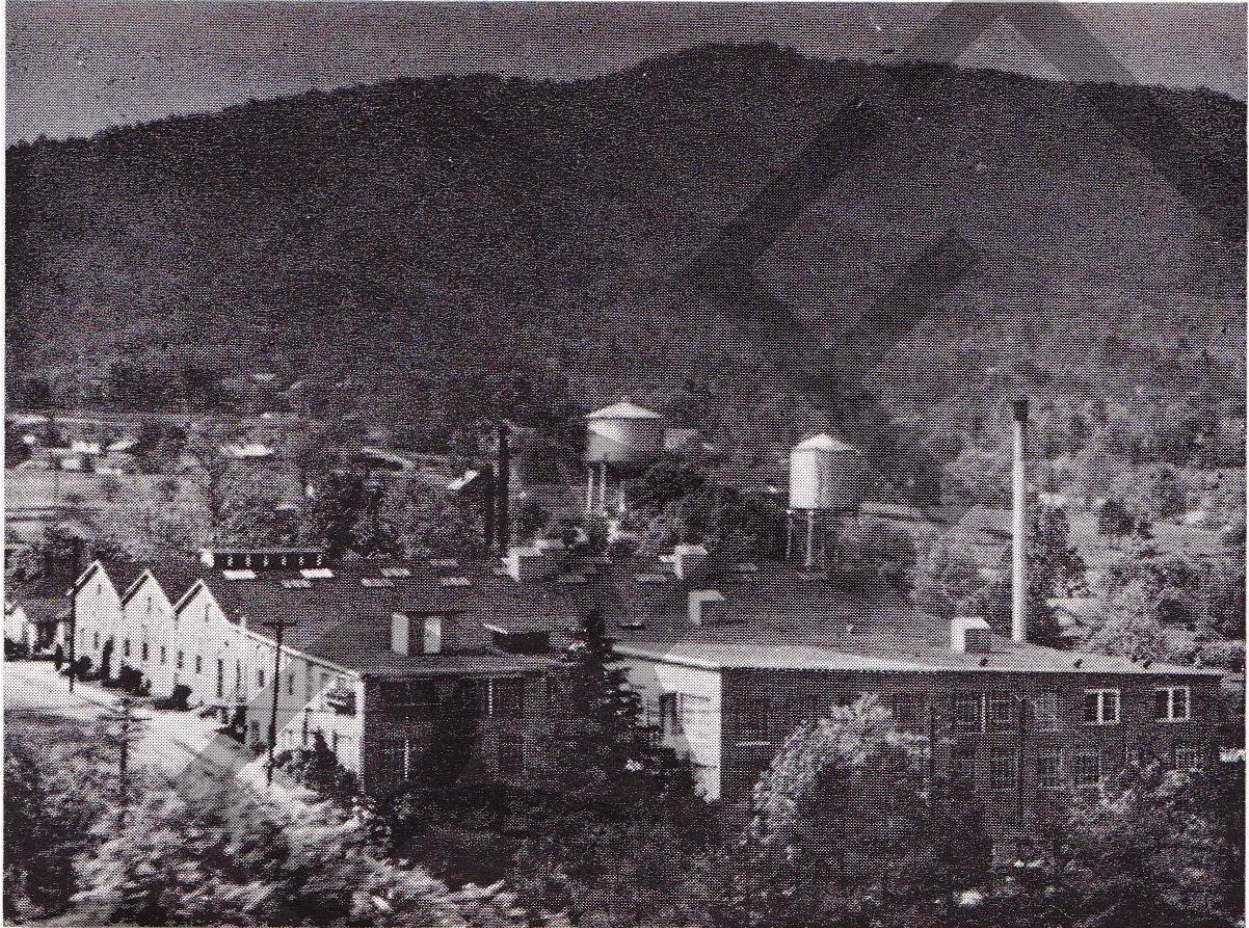
**Figure 10.** C. 1940s. Interior of the 1915-c.1920 tri-gabled portion (note the gable visible in the top left). Source: J. Gordon Queen Collection/History Museum of Burke County.



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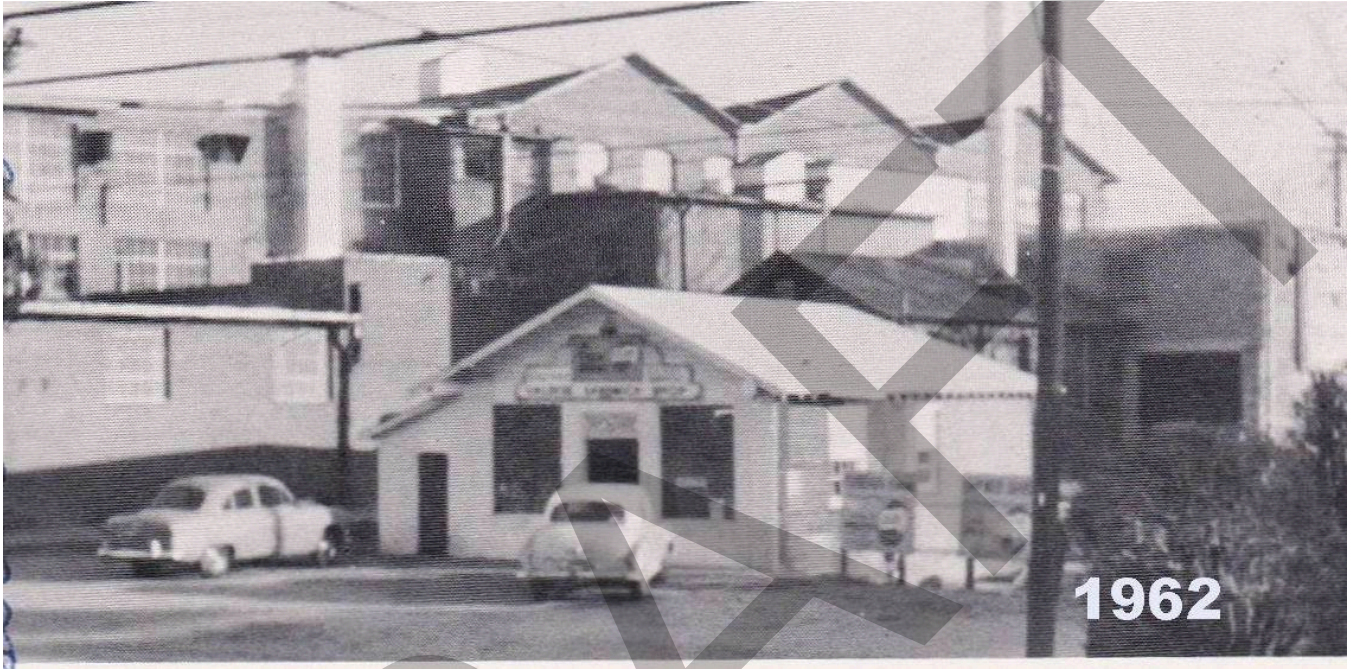
**Figure 11.** C. 1947. Photographer is facing southwest. Compare to *Figure 8*, taken from the same angle—note the c. 1941 addition. Source: *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years*, 35.



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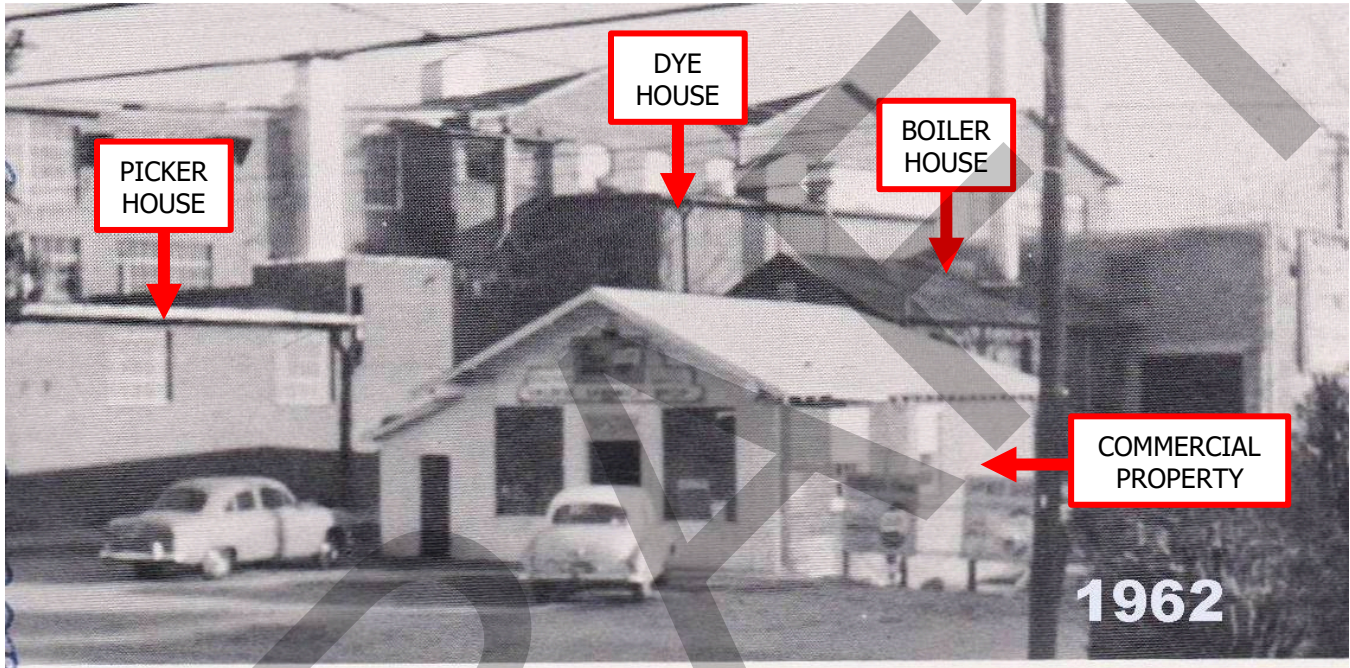
**Figure 12.** C. 1962. Photographer is facing southeast. Source: *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years* (Valdese Weavers, LLC: 2015), <https://vimeo.com/148522537>.



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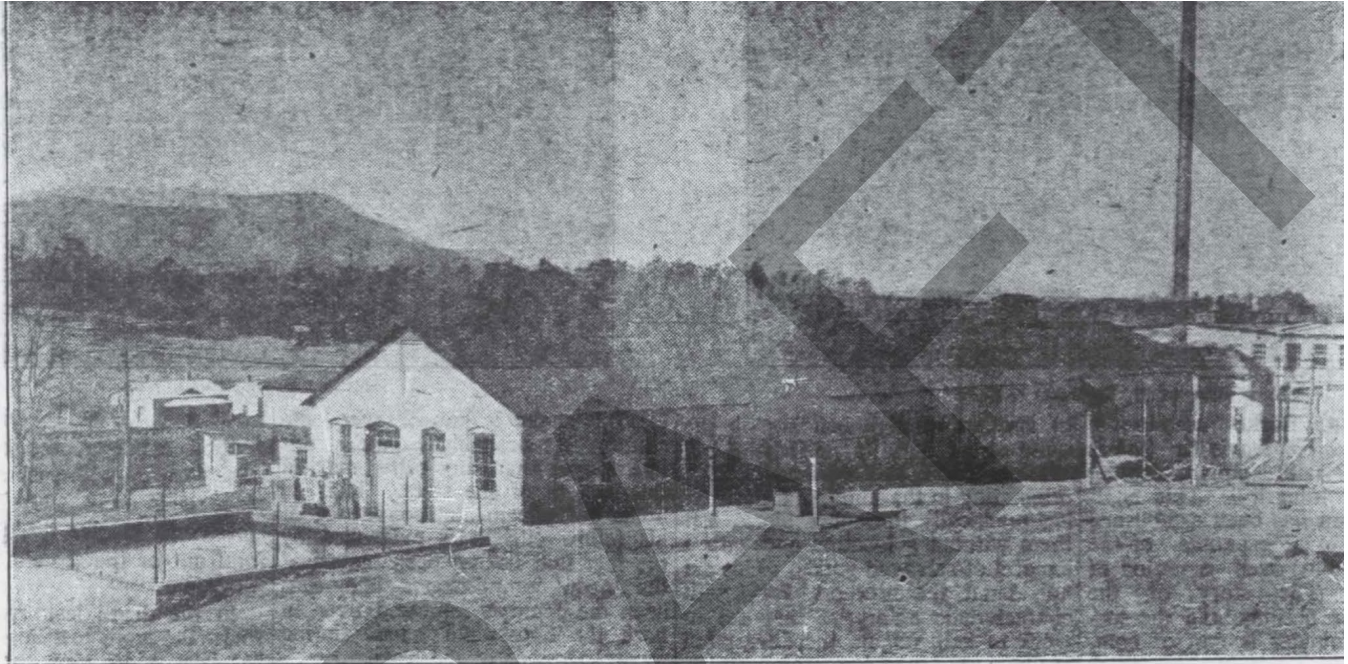
**Figure 13.** C. 1962. Photographer is facing southeast. Marked with the boiler house (c. 1915-1920), picker house (c. 1935), and dye house (c. 1935), as well as the commercial property to the northwest of the mill. Aside from portions of the dye house, which was incorporated into the c. 1960s addition, all are no longer extant. Source: *Valdese Weavers: 100 Years* (Valdese Weavers, LLC: 2015), <https://vimeo.com/148522537>.



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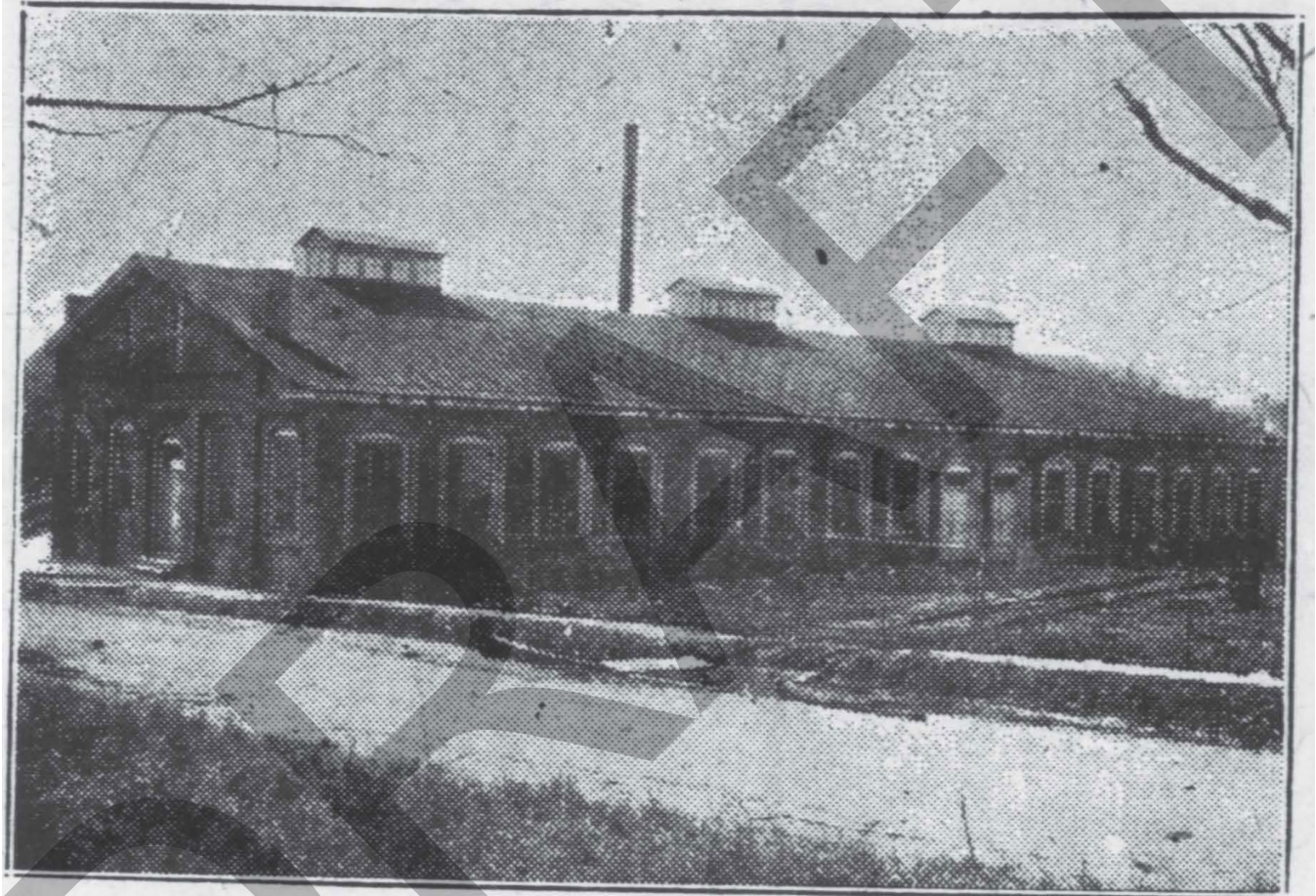
**Figure 14.** Comparison property, Waldensian Hosiery Mill, organized in 1901 in Valdese. Image c. 1920. Located at 309 Colombo Street SW in Valdese, the building is still extant, with later additions. It is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Image source: “Waldensian Hosiery Mill,” *News-Herald: Burke County Special* (Morganton, North Carolina), May 13, 1920, 16.



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**Figure 15.** Comparison property, Garrou—Morganton Fully-Fashioned Hosiery Mills, organized in 1917 in Morganton. Image c. 1920. Located at 101 & 105 Lenoir Street in Morganton, the building is still extant, with later additions. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. Image source: “Garrou Knitting Mills,” *News-Herald: Burke County Special* (Morganton, North Carolina), Many 13, 1920, 12.



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**Figure 16.** Comparison property, Valdese Manufacturing Company Mill, incorporated in 1913 in Valdese. Image c. 1987. Note the rubble stone and brick construction. Located at 312 Colombo Street SW in Valdese, the building is still extant. It is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Image source: J. Randall Cotton, *Historic Burke: An Architectural Sites Inventory of Burke County* (Morganton, North Carolina: Historic Burke Foundation, Inc., 1987), 35.

