

**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #548  
TURNER, Stephen**

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Description of interviewee: Stephen Turner is the director of the Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation for the City of Rock Hill and a driving force for the redevelopment of the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company for the future of Rock Hill, South Carolina.

*Interviewed:* June 28, 2017

*Interviewer:* Alex Windham

*Index by:* Alex Windham

*Length:* 00:28:45

Abstract: In his June 28, 2017 interview with Alex Windham, Stephen Turner detailed his involvement in the revitalization of the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company referred to locals as the Bleachery. Turner spoke of the history of the Bleachery and the plans for the future to redevelop and transition Rock Hill into the future. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Knowledge Park

**Interview Session (June 28, 2017): Digital File**

**Time      Keywords,**

00:00:00      *Start of Interview Beginning of Recording One*/Interviewer's Introduction

Rock Hill, SC held a tradition of textiles for 100 years the largest mill was the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company. The textile industry in Rock Hill was in extreme decline by the 1980s and so the city of Rock Hill sought to get involved for the future after textiles to rebuild the economy of Rock Hill. The Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation was formed for 20-25 years to develop business parks to replace textile jobs. Airport Industrial, Tech Park, Waterford Industrial, and Southway Industrial were all very successful in bringing jobs back to the area but not to the extent of the textile industry.

00:03:13      *End of Recording One*

00:00:00      *Beginning of Recording Two*

Around the year 2000-2001 the city began a planning process to redevelop and reinvest the old textile corridor. In 2000, there was 3 million square feet unused space in closed down textile mills across Rock Hill. The city had to be proactive and get involved. Therefore the city bought the Cotton Factory in the year 2000-2001 and the city worked as caretakers of the property until they sold it to Gary Williams (See Interview) of Williams and Fudge Inc. Also at this time the city of Rock Hill bought several other textile mills and redeveloped them. The city developed a plan for the Bleachery and the area between Downtown Rock Hill and

Winthrop University which they called “The Textile Corridor,” from 2002-2003. Turner thought that it was great for the area because the Bleachery was located between Winthrop and Downtown, both of which he called “anchors of Rock Hill,” and saw them as a good place to bridge and redevelop the textile corridor. In 2003 Lynn Stevenson bought the Bleachery property at a tax sale and had plans to redevelop the property but she never “could really pull it off,” and she died suddenly. Stephen felt that the 2008-2009 economic recessions caused her financial strain and so it affected her and she soon passed away in 2010. The city put tax increment districts in place, planning to support public improvements to infrastructure, but Stevenson could not make the development happen. The city waited from 2002-2010 and no redevelopment occurred. In that time according to Turner three major fires occurred, and extensive vandalism and so when Stevenson passed away the city took the opportunity and acquired the Bleachery property. The city brought together 70-80 city and business leaders from Rock Hill to go to Durham, North Carolina to go and see the American Tobacco Company. The city of Durham redeveloped the old tobacco factory and by doing this they greatly revitalized Durham’s downtown area.

00:06:01      *End of Recording Two*

00:00:00      *Beginning of Recording Three*

The Leaders formed the Knowledge Park Leadership Group and developed the Knowledge Park Plan. Knowledge Park consists of a one square mile section of Downtown Rock Hill from Fountain Park over to Cherry Road at the end of Winthrop University’s campus. Rock Hill city had a history developing business parks, so naturally this was used to place the idea to the public and have them accept it by claiming that it will be able to attract jobs and businesses to the city of Rock Hill. Knowledge Park’s vision is that it will be the center of Rock Hill’s 21 Century economy. It will rebuild Rock Hill’s economy just like the textile industry did before it.

00:02:46      The Bleachery Heritage Park is planned to have public space that tells the history of the Bleachery site, with graphics and sculpture. The focal point of this site within Knowledge Park will be a Roller Print machine. The Roller Print machines operated from the 1930s until the plant closed and they were essentially the lifeblood of the plants main production for a majority of the time the plant was in operation, and so Rock Hill city will commission local artists to use the machine as a sculpture medium in order to depict the history of the Bleachery.

00:05:15      Gary Williams is a member of the Knowledge Park Leadership Group and through his redevelopment of the Cotton Factory, he showed that it was possible to successfully redevelop an old textile mill and turn it into a modern business building. He created with the redevelopment 500 jobs in Rock Hill. The textile mill hired roughly half that amount of workers when it was in full operation. Comporium, a telecommunications company headquartered in Rock Hill, also is part of the Knowledge Park Leadership Group as it helped to establish Fountain Park on Main Street of Rock Hill and Park Place, and in the future it will also create hotels, residential groups, an office building, and a performing arts center. Another member that has already made its commitment to the Knowledge Park program is Family Trust Federal Credit Union, which has a history of being established for the workers of the Bleachery before it was used by others in Rock Hill and the surrounding area. According to Turner, Family Trust remodeled their old business across White Street from the plant. This action was to show their belief in the redevelopment of the Bleachery site.

00:07:30 The Lowenstein Building will open in Rock Hill in October and it will be the job center on the site. The hope in this by the city of Rock Hill will be that it will bring the business jobs and then by this lead to commercial enterprises. The jobs will be focused on technology and this is a strategy to establish a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy in Rock Hill. The idea is to transform Rock Hill's workforce from blue collar textiles to more sophisticated and specialized jobs and it is an initiative to further educate the area. Another hope of creating these jobs in Rock Hill will be to keep locals from traveling to Charlotte, North Carolina for work.

00:10:20 The Bleachery is not all of Knowledge Park but it is the biggest area under development in all of Knowledge Park. Stephen wanted to stress that people often get confused by this but he said that there is a lot of undeveloped property between Winthrop and Downtown that is going to be included in the project eventually. There are plans to also redevelop Springs Creative. He said the old textile corridor into a walkable urban mixed-use development. Overall, the process is projected to last between 15 and 20 years to complete. This is meant to be one continuous walking urban district. He mentioned that suburban development of Rock Hill began roughly in the 1960s and with these developments the city's center declined. Knowledge Park is wanted to create a different kind of life in Rock Hill, where the city's center is the focal point and where people both live and work in the community. He said that there is still a lot of potential for development in the area and it will take time for more and more areas to be realized. He began talking about the potential of the Rock Hill Herald Newspaper building as it is declining and his hope that the city will acquire that building and redevelop it too.

00:14:00 Since Dave Lyle Boulevard was built in the 1970s along with the railroad tracks that run parallel with it, it has created in Stephen's words "an investment no man's land" and the challenge of Knowledge Park is to redevelop and rebuild the investment in Rock Hill's city center. He also said that Dave Lyle Boulevard created an immense barrier and coupled with the railroad tracks it essentially created the "wrong side of the tracks." He mentioned that is a plan to build some sort of bridge across Dave Lyle Boulevard to connect Downtown with University Center (Bleachery site) for pedestrians to walk on. He hopes to have this location that creates an experience that people would actually want to walk and shop and work in the Downtown area rather than drive a car from place to place.

00:16:00 He said that there are also plans to redevelop the large municipal parking lot located along White Street. When Town Center Mall was built in the 1980s he said that all the buildings that used to surround Main Street were torn down to make parking for the mall. He said that after the failure of the mall the city was left with the remnants of large empty spaces that were not being used. There is now potential to fill those locations back in with businesses and redevelop the areas, leading to an even bigger urban sprawl.

00:17:40 When asked if he saw himself in 15 to 20 years still working for the city, he said that he would leave it to the next generation. He wants to "pass the torch," the Rock Hill Development Corporation is constantly changing and adding newer people and replacing older people. He said that these younger people are stepping forward to usher in the new changes to the area.

00:19:31 *End of Recording Three*

00:28:45 *End of Interview*