Fulling Around: The Shaker Fulling Mill at South Union, Kentucky

Donna C. Parker, Western Kentucky University
Jonathan J. Jeffrey, Western Kentucky University

Comments

Abstract
The fulling mill was an essential component of any successful early-19th century woolen industry. Fullers applied finishing techniques to cloth in order to create a stronger, more attractive, and more useful fabric. In 1813 the Shakers at Kentucky's South Union community constructed a fulling mill that serviced their own demands for textile finishing processes as well as those of area residents. The fulling mill, aided by the Shakers' three-year-old carding mill, developed by the 1860s into a full-fledged woolen factory.

Disciplines
Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations | Religion | Sales and Merchandising | Work, Economy and Organizations

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Additional Files
- Center House.jpg (115 kB)
  The Center House at South Union Construction on the structure began in 1822 and was completed in 1833. It housed the Center Family and included a large room for religious meetings and a commodious kitchen. This building and several others have been restored and are open for touring. (Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.)
- FM broadside.jpg (168 kB)
  Figure 1. Fulling mill broadside. 1815. South Union Shakers circulated this broadside to announce their fulling mill business. Another handbill, "INSTRUCTIONS for the information and benefit of Domestic Manufacturers of Woolen Cloths," advised customers on precise methods of preparing the wool before weaving. (Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.)
- FM record book.jpg (122 kB)
  Figure 2. Fulling mill record book. In their account books, South Union fullers recorded pertinent information about each transaction: customer's name and residence, finishing processes to perform, yardage, purpose of the cloth, and any special instructions from the customer. (Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.)
The South Union fulling mill, opened in 1815, was one of the community’s first commercial enterprise and served the area in and around Logan County, Kentucky. At the mill, Shakers fullled and dyed linsey, a cloth made of linen and wool, in colors ranging from light drab to bottle green. The Shakers fullled cloth for “the world” and their own textile industries. From 1810 to 1849 the Shakers cultivated flax and produced linen at South Union, Ky. They tried new techniques and equipment, with varying degrees of success, to make this arduous work easier. Not only did their linens provide necessary household and work textiles but also a product to trade with the “world’s people.” More economically produced textiles led to the demise of flax production in the western Kentucky community.