



The Cotton Mill Children: Tifton's Impact on America

Traveling Exhibition Host's Packet



Project/Exhibit Background:

In 2013-2014 ABAC's Georgia Museum of Agriculture worked with Massachusetts historian Joe Manning and others to develop a traveling exhibition featuring the work of photographer Lewis Hine. Hine was a photographer of the early 20th century whose work captured the lives of poor and working-class families across the United States-and particularly the unfair and unsafe conditions in which they worked on a daily basis.

The exhibit highlights the research of Joe Manning, who in 2006 discovered a series of photographs by Lewis Hine taken at the Tifton Cotton Mill. Enchanted by the image of a little girl in a plaid dress with an enigmatic smile, Manning embarked on a mission to discover the identities of the children and to learn about their lives and those of their families. His research eventually led him to the family of Mrs. A.J. (Catherine) Young.

Catherine Young relocated her children to the area to work in the Tifton Cotton Mill following the death of her sharecropper husband, Andrew J. Young. All but the four youngest of Catherine Young's nine children then remaining at home (2 eldest had already married and moved out-Ella and Georgia), worked regularly in the mill. Photographer Lewis Hine captured the images of the family during his visit to the area in 1909 to photograph Tifton Cotton Mill workers. Exactly three months later, Mrs. Young placed the seven youngest of her children in the South Georgia Methodist Orphan Home in Macon, GA-where they remained until they were taken in by other families, or left to pursue their lives beyond the home's relative security. The two eldest of the 9, Mell and Mattie-would remain with their mother and eke out a living on their combined wages.

The mobile exhibit featuring the story of the Young Family and overview on child labor and the Tifton Cotton Mill is offered for display to schools, museum institutions, and other venues. Three boxes of artifacts collected at the Tifton Cotton Mill accompany the ten exhibit panels. Files containing the stories of the lives of the 11 Young Children are available upon request as support material for this exhibition.

The complete story of the Young Family, interviews with many of their descendants, and Joe Manning's story of how the project came together can be viewed on Manning's website, [Mornings on Maple Street](#).

For more information, please contact Museum curator Polly Huff at phuff@abac.edu. This project is funded by the Georgia Humanities Council and ABAC's Georgia Museum of Agriculture.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL RENTALS:

Activity 1: (For Middle School)

As a creative writing assignment, have the class look at the photo of the two little girls inside the cotton mill. Have them write their own story of the girls. Include who they are, why are they there, etc. Whenever the class is finished, ask for volunteers to read their story. Afterwards, explain to the class the picture and compare/contrast the stories.

Activity 2: Essay Questions (For Middle and High School)

Have the class explain some working conditions of the cotton mill, as well as some aspects of child labor in the early 20th century.

Explain why the implementation of child labor laws changed how factories and mills were operated.

Activity 3: Essay Question (For High School)

Prompt A: Have the class write about the Young Family post child labor. Explain how they were able to overcome harsh working environments in the mills and being split up after adoptions.

Prompt B: Focus on what became of each of the children. In your opinion, were they able to grow up and have successful lives?