

ALABAMA

A Documentary History to 1900

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For my Griffith nephews
Ralph, John, Nicky,
Edwin, and Larry
With love

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A DAY WITH DANIEL PRATT

Mr. Pratt had long, long ago invited us to visit him and examine his manufacturing establishment at Prattville, in Autauga county, some fourteen miles west of Montgomery. . . . Prattville is a thrifty and handsomely situated manufacturing village, on Autauga creek, about four miles from Washington, on the Alabama river. This village has been built up by the industry and energy of Mr. Daniel Pratt, mainly, whose name it bears, within the last few years, probably eighteen. We arrived at Prattville as the sun was going down, when everything inanimate, with the operatives in the various factory departments, were, with the setting sun, closing the performances of the day. We found Mr. Pratt at home with his family, with whom we spent the evening to a late hour, in various conversations on the subject of agricultural improvement, agricultural machinery and Southern manufacturing, in all of which Mr. Pratt is deeply and practically interested. And we found Mrs. Pratt also, who is a lady of unusual intelligence and social vivacity, instructingly interesting on every subject appertaining to improvements about the homestead, such as tastefully arranged shrubbery, fine fruit and vegetable gardens and terraced vineyards, which contribute so essentially to the comfort, content and true pleasure of home, sweet home!

In the morning we commenced early after breakfast, as we had a great day's work before us. We spent the first hour in Mr. Pratt's gallery of paintings. Many hours we could have remained there, had time permitted, in contemplating the canvassed scenes of passed grandeur and greatness. Its beauty cannot be appreciated in description, however; it must be seen to be fully enjoyed. From the gallery we proceeded to the gin factory, which one of Prattville might easily imagine to be the pet of Mr. Pratt's ambition.

As you enter the door of the first floor you have in full view a line of shafting 250 feet long, on which, at suitable distances apart, are over seventy drums for driving the various machines used in the manufacture of gins. This room is 250 by 50 feet, fitted with machines adapted to the different kinds of work and material employed in the construction of gins.

The second floor is used for breasting and finishing gins. It has a large room partitioned off for the purpose of testing gins with seed cotton. Fifty pounds are run through each gin, and a note made of the time required to gin it. If the speed is not sufficient, or there is any other defect found in the performance, it is remedied at once. No gin is allowed to leave the shop until it performs satisfactorily.

The third floor is all in one room—probably the largest in the State—250 by 50 feet. Here the gins are painted and varnished, and put in order for boxing and shipping. There is an elevator large enough to receive the gins, which raises and lowers them from one floor to another by the aid of machinery.

In the garret is a cistern, kept full of water, which is raised from a spring underneath the shop by machinery. From this cistern each room is supplied with pure cold water by means of pipes. The waste water

from the cistern is conveyed to the centre of the square in front of the shop, where it jets thirty feet, and falls into a large circular reservoir.

Connected with the gin shop by a railway is a brick lumber-house, 172 feet long by 40 feet wide. In this house the lumber for manufacturing the gin stands is carefully stacked away, where it remains two years to season before it is used. An iron foundry is also connected with the shop, which works up about a hundred tons of iron annually. The gin shop turns out about \$160,000 worth of gins annually.

Adjoining the gin shop is a brick building, three stories high and 250 feet long, which is used for a grist-mill, a sash, door and blind factory, a machine shop, a shop for making horse mills, and a carriage and wagon shop, all furnished with suitable machinery for these various branches of business the machinery in both buildings is driven by one breast wheel of sixty-horse power.

There are fifty hands actively employed all the time in the gin factory and foundry together, many of whom are slaves, that seem to be well skilled in the performance of this work.

There is also quite an extensive and flourishing cotton factory here, a large share of the stock of which is owned by Mr. Pratt. It contains twenty-eight hundred spindles, one hundred looms, and is worked by one hundred and fifty hands, several of them slaves. It works up twelve hundred bales of cotton, and turns out two thousand bales of osnaburgs annually. The company contemplate at an early period putting up a new and greatly enlarged building for increasing their spindles and looms.

At a short distance below the gin factory—perhaps a half mile—Mr. Pratt has fitted up a large two-story brick building, in which he has already received and is putting up machinery of the latest improvement for carding and spinning wool, to be manufactured into kerseys, in another department of the cotton factory.

After examining the various factories and machinery, we took a stroll with Mr. Pratt through his garden, orchard and vineyard, where we found the same skill, industry and improvement of the soil; in a rich and well-cultivated vegetable garden, a beautiful orchard of fine fruit trees, embracing various varieties of the apple, peach, pear, plum and fig, all healthful and thrifty, and a vineyard of perhaps three to five acres of Scuppernongs and Catawbas, terraced in the most picturesque style to the summit level of a high and very steep hill, perhaps one hundred feet or more perpendicular, the upper terrace above the lower or first. The vines are all kept up by castiron posts, set along on the terraced embankments, and wire railings from post to post. This vineyard plat, so favorably located, contains, in all, twenty-five acres of land, and enclosed by a substantial brick and picket fence.

From the vineyard we returned to the mansion, where Mrs. Pratt had prepared for us an elegant dinner, with which we had the pleasure of testing several specimens of fine Autauga wine, the pure juice of the grape, and fruit of the vineyard we had just before examined. Of this wine Mrs. Pratt had several casks, the vintage of last year.

Thus closed one of the most interesting social visits it had been our good fortune to enjoy for years past.

Of Mr. Pratt's gins, we can say to our readers in want of a first-rate stand, unhesitatingly—and we say so without prejudicing any other factory—that, with all his late improvements and the advantages afforded by his large factory arrangements, he is able to furnish the neatest, most complete and best cotton gin stand in America.—*The Cotton Planter*, n.d. quoted in Mrs. S.F.H. Tarrant, ed., *Hon. Daniel Pratt* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet and Shepperson, 1904), pp. 62–66.

The gin works sustained the reputation set by Mr. Pratt and eventually became the Continental Gin Company of the twentieth century.

The extent of Mr. Pratt's interests is further illustrated by his own statement of the business done in one year.

The following is a statement of the business of Prattville for the year 1857:

Cotton Gin Manufactory,	\$144,000 00
Prattville Manufacturing Co.,	151,724 00
Sash, Door and Blind Manufactory,	13,360 00
Corn Mill (Horse-Power),	17,160 00
Foundry,	11,432 00
Carriage,	6,500 00
Tin,	3,050 00
Machine and Blacksmith's Shops,	8,694 00
Printing Business,	8,000 00
Mercantile Business,	155,249 00
Total,	\$519,169. 00

DANIEL PRATT

Prattville, January, 1858.—From an advertisement issued by Pratt, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 68.

By 1850, Alabama had 12 cotton mills, employing 715 people and processing 5,208 bales of cotton each year. Ten years later the number of mills was only 14 but the amount of cotton being raised had doubled and the number of workers had increased. Alabama was making strides in textile manufacturing, by 1860 ranking fourth among the southern states, but even then the state (along with the other southern states) was doing little to free its residents from their dependence on northern goods.

MINING

Coal and iron are the best known of the many minerals to be found in the state. A mineral that attracted much more attention for a time however was gold. Although the amount extracted was never great (probably not over a total of a million dollars) in comparison to other gold fields, it was an important factor in east central Alabama in the 1830's and 1840's.