

William Gregg

(Husband of Marina Jones, daughter of Matthias Jones)

William Gregg, jeweler, watchsmith, champion of industry, and founder of the Graniteville Company, was known as the father of Southern cotton manufacturing.

Gregg was born February 2, 1800, in western Virginia, the son of William and Elizabeth Webb Gregg. His mother died when he was 4 years old, and he was reared by a neighbor woman until he was about 10. He was then sent to live with an uncle, Jacob Gregg, a successful watch and spinning-machine maker in Alexandria, Virginia.

A few years later, his uncle established a cotton mill in Georgia, one of the South's first. The mill did not survive the War of 1812. In 1814, William Gregg was apprenticed to a friend of his uncle's, a Mr. Blanchard, a watchmaker and silversmith in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1821, Gregg moved to Petersburg, Virginia, to perfect himself in his profession.

Gregg undoubtedly formed a strong friendship with Mr. Blanchard. A decade after leaving his employment, Gregg stopped at the Blanchard's new home in Louisville, Kentucky, to pay his respects. Sitting at Blanchard's bench, Gregg made a silver pitcher of the treasured first coins he ever earned. It became an heirloom that was handed down from first son to first son in the Gregg family.

After completing training, he moved to South Carolina and established a jewelry business in Columbia. On a sales trip, he called on Colonel Mathias Jones, who operated a store at Ridge Spring in Edgefield District. There he met Jones' eldest daughter, Marina, and they were married in 1829.

Gregg was prosperous in Columbia, and during the 1830s, he not only traveled extensively throughout the United States, but he retired with a large amount of discretionary capital. In 1838, he bought an interest in what became Hayden, Gregg and Company, a jewelry and silversmithing firm in Charleston and moved his family to the Lowcountry.

Also in 1838, he bought into the Vaocluse Manufacturing Company, a cotton mill in Barnwell District. His experience with Vaocluse taught him two things: first, how cotton manufacturing in the South should not be conducted (the plant was a model of inefficiency), and, second, in his words, "a settled conviction . . . that manufacturing is a business that ought to engage the two Carolinas and Georgia."

In 1844, William Gregg traveled to New England to inspect its textile districts, and the trip, coupled with the lessons of Vaocluse, prompted him to write a series of essays for the Charleston Courier that would become known as the Essays on Domestic Industry, a visionary call for the active development of mills in the South.

While corporations were not commonplace in those days, shortly after publishing the essays, Gregg and a group of mostly Charlestonians applied for and, in 1845, received a charter from the state Legislature for the Graniteville Manufacturing Company.

The Graniteville Company relied on local people to build the mill as well as operate it, employing farmers, tenant farmers, and the poor at wages commensurate with those paid to Northern mill workers. Granite quarried about a mile from the plant site was used in the construction.

Gregg provided quality housing for his workers, as well as a church and a small library. They received medical care for a small fee. They had gardens and woods from which to harvest timber.

Gregg also created what was perhaps the first compulsory education system in the United States. He built a school for children from 6 to 12 years old, furnished teachers and books, and fined parent workers five cents a day, withheld from their wages, for every day their children were absent from classes.

Gregg was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1856, and he continued to argue passionately for internal industrial development. He believed that there was little reason to look to the expanding West or the industrialized North when so much of the treasures of South Carolina, in his eyes, lay untapped.

Graniteville Manufacturing Company barely survived the Civil War. Immediately after the war ended, Gregg worked diligently toward the continued modernization of his company through travel, research, and the investment of about \$120,000 in personal capital for more modern machinery.

In April 1996, Graniteville Company was sold to Avondale Mills, Inc.; it currently operates as Graniteville Fabrics.

The University of South Carolina–Aiken Library features the Gregg–Graniteville Memorial Rooms, which contain The Gregg–Graniteville Collection. The collection has proven of primary value for scholars in Southern economic, social, and labor history for the period 1845 to 1985, as well as for cultural historians of the South as it moved into the 20th century.

William and Marina Gregg were the parents of three children, Mary, William, and James. Gregg died on September 13, 1867.

He was inducted into the South Carolina Business Hall of Fame in 1985.

William Gregg and Aiken's First Peaches

William Gregg was born in Monongalia County, West Virginia in 1800. William's mother died when he was four years old, and his uncle Jacob Gregg took him in. William's uncle made both watches and textile spinning machinery. What may have seemed like two entirely different skill types were, in fact, a perfect match for the young William Gregg.

As an adult, William made his fortune in Charleston from his success as a watchmaker, a silversmith, an importer, and from his inheritance. He wrote a series of articles that appeared in the Charleston Courier. These articles outlined ways in which men of business in the South could invest in manufacturing. Gregg wrote about his belief that the area should stop depending on

plantation agriculture as the only means of commerce. These articles eventually were consolidated into a pamphlet called *Essays on Domestic Industry* and made Gregg the leading advocate for industrialization.

A Move from Charleston

It was his personal involvement with a Vaucluse mill, less than three miles from downtown Aiken, that spurred him to move from Charleston and begin work on his most deeply held dream of helping poor, southern people prosper in a structured mill village.

By the time Gregg made Aiken his permanent home in 1845, he was quite wealthy. He was ready to prove that his ardent belief in rescuing the economy of the South from a reliance on plantation agriculture could become a reality. Many people who didn't own their own land found it difficult to provide for themselves and their families. These people often could not read or write, and they had no specific skills other than working on other people's farms. The Graniteville Manufacturing Company Mill and village were constructed on the banks of Horse Creek – then Edgefield County and today, Aiken County – six miles from the City of Aiken. Gregg's project was named "Graniteville" because the main material used to construct it was granite mined from a local quarry.

Graniteville had a huge cotton mill at the center of the town. Gregg had houses built that were affordable for the workers to rent and that were maintained by the company. There were village doctors to take care of illness. Parents were responsible, as employees of the mills, to make sure their children attended the school in the village. Many children of that era were forced to work by the age of eight or nine, but Gregg's "compulsory school" meant that parents could not work for the mill unless they made sure their children attended school regularly. Shortly after the mill opened in 1849, with the village in place, Graniteville became one of the most successful textile factories in the southern United States.

Highest Hill in Town

While Gregg watched so many of his personal theories of industrialization thrive, he made his home up the hill from Graniteville in a house called "Kalmia." It was built on the summit of the highest hill in the town of Aiken on which hundreds of Kalmia bushes grew. His large house stood on the corner of what today is Richland and Summit. The house was one of the first in town to have "illuminating gas" that provided light, rather than just candles or oil lamps.

Above all other interests, William Gregg enjoyed gardening. And as a very energetic man on the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, he approached gardening with the same enthusiasm as he did everything else in his life. In 1857, he planted 2,000 peach trees in front of his house on the 100 acres on which it stood. Gregg regularly attended meetings with Governor James Hammond at the Beech Island Farmer's Club to confer with other growers and apply what he'd learned to make his crop flourish. He also got advice from his good friend Henry William Ravenel, the famous botanist who lived and did his research in Aiken.

Gregg wanted his peach orchard to demonstrate the success that could be accomplished by South Carolina farmers, and soon he began shipping his fruit, each peach individually wrapped and packed, by night train from the nearby Kalmia Station. The peaches traveled to Charleston, where they were transferred to a steamer ship and taken directly to New York City. People there bought the fruit as soon as it arrived. Gregg's Aiken-grown peaches had the reputation in New York as being the freshest peaches available. A mere three days elapsed between the time the peaches were picked off the tree in Aiken and when they could be eaten 800 miles away.

Right before the start of the Civil War, Gregg planted 6,000 more peach trees on terraces that sloped to the east behind his house. Entries from his personal diary show that he mostly grew the Tillotson variety of peach. He also mentions that he "grafted Chinese peaches." All told, Gregg had a combined orchard of 8,500 trees. He was the first commercial peach farmer in South Carolina, as well as the "Father of the Southern Textile Industry."

So less than two hundred years ago, on land that today hosts hundreds of private homes as well as businesses such as Walmart, Aiken Regional Medical Centers and the University of South Carolina Aiken, thousands of peach trees once stood, supplying fruit to both local and national consumers.

Gregg, Major James Jones (?? - 21 APR 1876)

Major James Jones Gregg died in Augusta Geo. Apl. 21, 1876, from wounds received at the hands of one Robert McEvoy in Graniteville So. Ca. on Thursday 19th April 1876. The deceased citizen was a native of So. Ca. and was at the time of his decease actively engaged in his business in Graniteville, of which he was a large proprietor.... A notice of the deceased is hereunto attached from the *Charleston News & Courier*. [clipping] "Major James Jones Gregg, who was brutally and wantonly shot by Robert McEvoy, at Graniteville, on Thursday, died at his residence in Augusta, at half-past 1 o'clock yesterday. Major Gregg was the son of the late William Gregg, of Charleston, the founder of Graniteville, and spent most of his early life in this city...."