



The Cotton Mill Children: Tifton's Impact on America

Traveling Exhibit Teacher's Packet



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The Cotton Mill Children
Teacher's Packet

GEORGIA
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL

PROJECT/EXHIBIT BACKGROUND:

The Georgia Museum of Agriculture & Historic Village worked with Massachusetts historian Joe Manning and others to develop a traveling exhibit 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 of Tifton Cotton Mill workers while searching for information on the work of Lewis Hine. Enchanted by the image of the 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 researches eventually led to 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 Mrs. Young's nine children then remaining at home 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, Georgia – where they remained until they were taken in by other families or left to pursue their lives beyond its relative security. The two eldest – 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 will be offered for display to the Tift County Public Schools* and to Tiftarea Academy* before being made available to schools and museum institutions outside of Tifton. Between tours, the exhibit will be on display at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture & Historic Village.

*Each school participating in the tour will be provided with an exhibit poster for the main office, and 8 exhibit flyers to be placed throughout the school as needed. Also, each school will be provided with an appropriate number of take-home brochures. A short TV spot advertising the exhibit at each school is available upon request.

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 (229) 391-5222 or phuff@abac.edu, or Museum facilities coordinator Elaine Auger at (229) 391-5204 or eauger@abac.edu. This project is funded by the Georgia Humanities Council and the Georgia Museum of Agriculture & Historic Village



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

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 the early 19th century.

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

Activity 3: Essay Question (For High School)

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. Also, focus on what became of each of the children. In your opinion, were they able to grow up and have successful lives?

