

**Loray Mill Strike, 1929** (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/nclc.01346/> (Photo))

In the early decades of the 1920s, the textile industry in North Carolina was booming. But by the 1920s, mill owners faced increased competition and a declining economy. They tried to cut costs by applying new principles of scientific management which was intended to reduce the labor force and thus ensure that each laborer was as efficient as possible. This practice was referred to as “the stretch out” by mill workers and was often accompanied by a pay decrease. Union organizers saw the southern textile mill industry as the perfect place to gain a foothold in a region that had previously resisted organized labor. In spring of 1929, an NTWU organizer arrived in North Carolina in search of a mill where labor conditions were poor enough and laborers were eager enough to form a union. Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, proved to be the ideal location. Many workers joined the union and the mill owners responded by firing five union members in late May 1929. In response to the firings, the union members voted to strike. On April 1, approximately 1,800 workers refused to return to the mill until their demands were met. The owners refused to negotiate and by the end of the month, the majority of the workers returned to their jobs. However, a few hundred workers continued to strike and remained in picket lines even after being evicted from their mill-owned homes and were forced to live in tents set up by the union. There were frequent altercations between the strikers and the local deputies, but on June 7, the altercations took a turn for the worse as Gastonia police chief, Orville Aderholt was shot and killed. 16 union workers were tried for murder but were later released when a mistrial was declared in September. The mill owners filed for bankruptcy in the early 1930s. The following primary sources draw attention to and offer insight concerning the events of the strike as well as the plight of the many mothers who were workers at the mill.

**"Richard H. Edmonds Pays Visit to Loray Mills." The Gastonia Daily Gazette, Gastonia, N.C., April 27, 1929, republished from the Charlotte Observer.**

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Richard H. Edmonds Pays Visit To Loray Mills

(Charlotte Observer)

With an abundance of southern labor waiting to take jobs left by strikers, mill officials of this section have little to fear from strikers, said Richard H. Edmonds, editor of the Manufacturers' Record of Baltimore, yesterday after making a study of the strike situation at Loray mills and other nearby manufacturing establishments.

Mr. Edmonds visited every department of the Loray mills yesterday, he said, and found that 1,147 people were at work out of a force of 1,150, which is employed when the mill is running full.

“There are plenty of strikers, but their jobs are all taken by people who are glad to work,” he said. Mr. Edmonds quoted the Loray officials as saying that they didn't intend to hire any of the strikers again.

There doesn't seem to be any real grievance,” according to Mr. Edmonds. “The strike leaders have just gotten a hold in a mill where labor conditions are worse than anywhere else in this

locality, where the labor turnover is the heaviest in the section, and where the worst class of labor to be found anywhere near is located," he declared.

This is a condition found in many places where the mill houses only a portion of the employees and the transient help rents from commercial landlords, in the opinion of Mr. Edmonds. The Loray management is now building a number of houses to do away with this condition.

Mr. Edmonds found the strikers well fed, he said, although no one knows how long the landlords are going to let them remain in their houses. Most of them are anxious to talk about their troubles and tell great stories of how there are many workers working for wages of from \$6 to \$9 on full time, but investigation shows that they are all making \$10 to \$15 and no concrete evidence of lower wages can be obtained, according to Mr. Edmonds.

Condemns Strikers

Mr. Edmonds had little of complimentary nature to say about the strikers. One of them, he declared, "told me he'd just been released from an insane asylum before getting his job at Loray. Another, a woman, must have been vaccinated with a victrola needle—she had such a line of complaints to make."

He described the crowds of strikers as a "cesspool of humanity" and said that Beal had badly misled them in a number of ways. Mr. Edmonds returned to Baltimore yesterday.

**"Beal Blams Mill Forces For Recent Strike Outrage." The Gastonia Daily Gazette, Gastonia, N.C., April 20, 1929. (<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5962> )**

### **Beal Blames Mill Forces For Recent Strike Outrage**

Fred Beal, southern organizer for the National Textile Workers' Union and Carl Reeve of the International Labor defense, have issued the following statement regarding the Loray strike situation:

"Those who are fighting the battles of the mill owners organized a lawless mob and wrecked our headquarters, then arrested the strikers who were there defending it and charged them first with 'damaging property' and 'disorderly conduct.'

"The deputies and soldiers, if they did not actually participate, stood and looked on without interfering. A pair of handcuffs was found in the ruins, as well as bullet shells such as are used by the deputies and guardsmen. The tools used by the mob were tools which had on them the Manville Jenckes label and are used within the mills. This frame up is as obvious as the fake bomb plot perpetrated a few days ago.

"The acts of this lawless mob prove to the population that our opponents will use their hired thugs and gangsters and go to any length to try to prevent relief and try to starve the strikers out. The authorities co-operated by arresting and in at least one case brutally beating unarmed strikers. The workers of the town are greatly indignant and the strike has been materially

strengthened by this outrage. We are establishing new headquarters and as a result of the outrage hundreds of new members are flocking into our union from the Gastonia mills.

“There is no split in our union. Our ranks are as strong as ever. There is no division. Proof of this is the splendid spirit of the strikers and the huge mass meetings held. We will carry out our program of organizing the thousands of textile workers in this section—spreading the strike. The strike at the Manville Jenckes mill is in a healthy condition. We will win.”

**Redouble Effort To Apprehend Fred Erwin Beal — Reported To Have Been Seen Going Toward Elizabethton. (<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5991> ) 600-Odd Are Jailed. Many Held In Jail As Suspects In Shooting Of Adderholt.**

With the death of the chief of police O. F. Adderholt Saturday morning at 10:20 o'clock as a result of a gun shot wound in the back and lungs Friday night, at the hands of unknown assailants at the tent colony of the Loray strikers and strike leaders, county and city officers turned with redoubled zeal to the task of apprehending Fred Erwin Beal, organizer and alleged inciter of the mob that did Chief Adderholt to his death.

Late Saturday afternoon no trace of his whereabouts had been found and officers were at a loss as to where to proceed. Rumors had it that he had been seen riding toward Elizabethton, Tenn. He had just returned Wednesday from the Tennessee strike area.

In the meantime, none of the 50 or 60 people arrested Friday night had been released from jail. All are under arrest on charges of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill. Among the more prominent of the strike colony under arrest are Amy Schechter, Vera Bush, and three other women connected with the strike colony as organizers, Workers International relief committee, etc. Others arrested are George Carter, Chester Pa., suspected of being a regular gunman, judging from his conversation and experiences, Joseph Harrison, of Passaic, N.J., who knew Beal in Passaic and New Bedford, and Louis McLaughlin, a Loray worker, who has been identified by Charlie Ferguson as the man who shot him.

Carter has but lately arrived in Gastonia. He said he came to get a taste of strike life, and was put to guarding the headquarters building. He told of how the officers approached the building and of his challenging them. He seems to have it in for Gilbert, judging from the allusions made to this officer. He and Gilbert, at any rate, engaged in a scuffle, he said, and in the melee a gun was discharged and Adderholt fell. When discovered by officers and deputies a few minutes later, Carter was under the edge of the tent with a loaded shot gun. He was brought out at the point of a gun.

Harrison, who was shot in the right arm and side, did not give a very connected account of the affair. Judging from the guarded answers which he gave to questions by onlookers and police officers, he is a very reticent youth and knows the ins and outs of the game. He refused to say anything except that he was near the officers and got some of the shot intended for them. He claims not to know many of the other strikers and gave as his reason for not telling more, that his head hurt, and that he was not right clear in his mind as to what had happened. He has the dialect and brogue of a “Joisy” tough.

Louis McLaughlin, alleged striker, who has been identified by Charlie Ferguson as the man who shot at him is said to have been a guard. He was captured with a shotgun in his possession and several shells. Many others were found with shells and pistol cartridges in their pockets.

The trouble at the tent colony began early in the evening Friday among the strikers, or alleged strikers—many of them have never been inside the Loray mill and have come to this colony to hang on for what they can get out of it, reputable mills not giving them employment on account of their reputation. It seems that one of the speakers made some disparaging remarks about some of the workers in the mills, and that some of the colony resented this. Rotten eggs and other missiles were hurled and in a few moments there was a sort of free-for-all fight. Some say that the strikers themselves called the police department to help allay this quarrel.

At any rate, when the police officers arrived on the scene, Adam Hord heard a voice behind the house yell, "Shoot the — — officers." He said he ran around the house in chase of this man, and while he was chasing him the shooting began on the other side of the house. This fact saved him from possible injury.

C. L. Johnson, taxi driver, offered to bring Adderholt home. After he had been lifted into the car someone fired on it again, shattering the windshield.

Carter and Harrison who was only slightly wounded and McLaughlin are said to have been taken to jail in other counties of the state and are being held as defendants in the murder of O. F. Adderholt. All the above who were arrested are being held under the charge of assault with deadly weapon, which has been changed to murder with the death of the chief of police.

Solicitor Carpenter, Mayor Denny, City Manager Rutter and County Commissioners Beal and Stowe had a conference this morning relative to the matter of offering a reward for the apprehension of the murderer, but no action was taken.

Beal was the first so-called strike organizers to reach Gastonia. He came here the last of March and immediately opened his campaign of vituperation and abuse. George Pershing quickly followed him and the two together quickly enrolled many union members. Then came Ellen Dawson, Vera Bush and Amy Schechter. The Dawson girl has gone back to Boston and there are several others whose names are not known, who have lately come into Gastonia. They spend much of their time visiting cotton mill centers and inciting to strike and in teaching the children of strikers communistic lessons.

Died at 10:20 A.M.

Chief Orville F. Adderholt, head of the Gastonia police force for the past seven years and victim last night of a murderous attack made upon several officers by strikers at the Loray mill, died at 10:20 o'clock this morning at the Gaston Sanatorium. At three o'clock this morning, six hours after the shooting occurred, doctors attending Chief Adderholt, stated that he appeared to be resting well and to have a chance of recovery. However, at about seven o'clock this morning convulsions set in, as a result of the puncturing of his lungs by shot from the gun of one of the striker-guards who participated in last night's one-sided battle. A short while later the Chief

suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, accompanied by other convulsions, and the end came shortly after 10 o'clock.

A Sketch

...Hardly ever in the history of Gastonia has the death of any public figure so shocked and obviously affected the entire population. All through the night and morning crowds of people swarmed about the city hall which along with the hospital and other points was bombarded with incessant telephone calls inquiring into the Chief's condition. For a time the promise that the Chief had a chance to recover seemed to lessen the tensivity of the feeling that hovered over the city, and the news of his death this morning brought with it a sorrow that was as great as it was universal.

Among his assistants and associates, Chief Adderholt was held in the highest regard in his authority; among his innumerable friends here, who hailed him daily as "Chief," he was looked upon as "the best chief of police Gastonia has ever had." To "Chief" his duty as an officer of the law was supreme, and in the execution of his trust he never failed. He was as courageous as he was generous, as true as he was good, and in his death the city has a loss from which it will be difficult to recover. The entire city mourns with his family, the death of "Chief."

**The Mill Mother's Lament by Ella Mae Wiggins** (<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5169> )

We leave our homes in the morning,  
We kiss our children good-bye,  
While we slave for the bosses,  
Our children scream and cry.

And when we draw our money,  
Our grocery bills to pay,  
Not a cent to spend for clothing,  
Not a cent to lay away.

And on that very evening  
Our little son will say:  
'I need some shoes, Mother,  
And so does Sister May.'

How it grieves the heart of a mother,  
You everyone must know.  
But we can't buy for our children,  
Our wages are too low.

It is for our little children,  
That seems to us so dear,  
But for us nor them, dear workers,  
The bosses do not care.

But understand, all workers,  
Our union they do fear.  
Let's stand together, workers,  
And have a union here.