

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Road to Happiness:
Paternalism in Canton's
Champion Paper and Fibre Company

A Senior Thesis

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By

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A timeline of the Champion paper mill in Canton from its earliest beginnings to modern day is filled with fascinating instances, ranging from the Strike of 1924, to the tragic death of Reuben Robertson Jr. and the subsequent instillation of a union in the mill.¹ At first glance, Canton may be looked over as just another small town with a dull history. However, it is just the opposite, as Canton's history has more depth than most would predict. At the heart of Canton sits the Champion Paper and Fibre Company, a monumental mill in the bigger picture of the paper industry. However, it is the context of the South during the twentieth century that distinguishes Canton's mill from any other, particularly in North Carolina.

To fathom the importance and exceptionality of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company, one first must understand industry and labor during the early twentieth century, and the relationship between the two. In Barbara Griffith's book *The Crisis of American Labor*, she explains that in the North, labor unions were aggressive and prominent in industries, only growing in strength as time passed. This led to the South becoming a "non-union haven for 'runaway' Northern businesses."² One of those businesses being the Champion Coated Paper Company, founded by Peter G. Thomson in Hamilton, Ohio in 1893. It took fifteen years for Champion's expansion to reach the South, during that time Thomson's daughter Hope married Reuben Buck Robertson and upon Thomson's request Reuben ventured to Canton to oversee the construction of the mill. Reuben's love of the area turned his fifty-day stay overseeing the initial

¹ "Champion Hamilton mill chronology, 1893-2005," *Laurel Court: The Home of Peter G. Thomson*, last modified 2006, accessed on November 22, 2014, <http://www.laurelcourt.com/champion-paper-timeline.html>.

² Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, (Philadelphia, 1988), preface.

construction of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company, into sixty-five years of service to the company and to Canton.³

The relationship between Peter G. Thomson running his branch of Champion in Hamilton, Ohio and Reuben Robertson Sr. becoming president of the Canton division created at its core a paternalistic model of industry, the essence of family was rooted in the establishment and development of the Champion industry.

A common issue facing mills in the South was a lengthening in work hours and a lessening in pay, paired also with advancements in industrial technology which was forcing employees out, and those who were left in the industries with much more responsibility and overly-strenuous workloads. All of these factors often came together to produce discussion of unionization as to improve working conditions. This was no different for Canton. However, one of the many instances of the Canton mill's history that sets it apart from other industries in the South is the timing of their labor uproar. The wave of labor strikes in the South really began in 1929 and carried on during the 1930s. Most notably was the General Strike of 1934 across the North Carolina piedmont, where an estimated four hundred thousand textile workers had walked off their jobs, marking this event as "the largest single labor conflict in American history."⁴ The Champion Paper and Fibre Company, conversely, had already experienced and solved its' union uproar prior to the wave of labor strikes that swept North Carolina in the 1930s nearly ten years before the discussion of unionization surfaced in the North Carolina piedmont.

³ Elaine Kaye Lanning, "Robertson, Reuben Buck," *NCPedia*, last modified 1994, accessed on November, 22, 2014, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/robertson-reuben-buck>.

⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James L. Leloudis, Robert R. Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, Christopher B. Daly, and Micheal Frisch, *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 230-236.

Paternalism continued throughout the Champion Company in Canton for decades following the Strike of 1924. Canton had become a mill village that relied on the industrial body to provide for the community. John Kleinig's *Paternalism* explains paternalism and its use in building, maintaining, and expanding an industry in a competitive economy. The paternalistic model for industry assumes that the management of an industry is obliged to serve and provide for the community surrounding their industry. An industry using a paternalistic model was held responsible for the social and economic structure of their community.⁵ In Rex A. Lucas' *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, he explains that the most susceptible areas to the paternalistic mill village environment were locations that were primarily agricultural and low poverty, with a small population. Which Canton embodied Lucas' description of a small agricultural community becoming a mill village to the point that his description of mill villages in Canada sound nearly identical to the situation that was created in Canton. Lucas also explains that for towns like Canton it is no sheer luck that industries move in. Industries dwelling in pulp and paper, sawmills, smelting, and refining are what he refers to as "resource-located" industries that often seek out small town opportunities to build and develop a community around based off of a paternalistic mill village strategy.⁶

The mill village typically consisted of a supervisor's home, designated houses for workers and their families, one or more churches, a school, and a company store. All of these were located in Canton, and by having the mill influence the major cornerstones of a community, it enabled the mill supervisors to monitor their employees. Mills would support and sponsor small businesses, as a way to uphold their social responsibility for the development of the community, but in a darker light to ensure that the money that they paid their employees stayed

⁵ Kleinig, John. *Paternalism*. (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1983), 143-152.

⁶ Rex A. Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 15-18.

within the community, which furthered debts workers may have held to their employers. However, the mill village model was not always this negative, for mill owners would typically provide recreational and educational opportunities, which can be seen throughout Canton's history under the paternalistic model.⁷

Allen Tullos provides numerous examples of mill villages and industries spanning across North Carolina's piedmont in his book, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*. Tullos explains that just as the Champion companies were under the Thomson relatives, often mills and their villages were often developed by a single family. He introduces the Holt family who developed a textile mill in Glencoe, North Carolina. The Holt family had been "one of the Carolina Piedmont's pioneering and prominent manufacturing families since the 1830s..."⁸ handing down their resources and wealth from one generation to the next, which allowed for the development of the mill, and its' village in Glencoe. This model of keeping the business in the family was adopted and encouraged in the Champion companies, with Thomson's two sons, Alexander and Logan inheriting divisions of the Champion Company, and Thomson's two son-in-laws, Reuben Robertson and Walter D. Randall, also taking prominent roles in the development and strengthening of the Champion brand.

Another component of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company that stands out from other mills in the South is its absence from Operation Dixie, which occurred from 1946 to 1953 and essentially ended paternalism in mills by bringing about unionization. Champion, however, under the direction of Reuben Robertson Jr. rolled through this period without union uproar as

⁷ Hall, *Like A Family*, 179-180.

⁸ Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 18-19.

the Canton community was not displeased with the Robertson's paternalistic model that had lived in Canton since 1908. Barbara Griffith's book, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* explains Operation Dixie: the reasoning and the goals, mentalities of Southerners, unionizers, and mill owners alike, and the implications that occurred afterwards throughout mills in the South. This book shows unionization tactics during Operation Dixie for mills in the South that were not seen under Robertson Jr. but instead came about roughly fifteen years after the movement for unionization began.⁹

“A successful company is built alike of tradition and invention, caution and experiment, conservation and change. It blazes trails for the future and orients them by pale star of the past. Its methods are flexible but its principles are adamant.”¹⁰ Read this quote again replacing “company” with “family,” as that is how Reuben Robertson Sr. and countless other entrepreneurs saw their companies, as families. In dissecting this clip from a speech Reuben Robertson Sr. gave in 1950, one can compare how building and maintaining an industry is similar to that of raising a family. This is the basis of paternalism in the workplace, a strategy used by business men to manage their companies and their employees. The paternalistic strategy has often been viewed as a negative, a “welfare capitalism,” that keeps the elite at the top and the working class at the bottom. However, an alternative perception on paternalism claims that it creates a notion of “negotiated loyalty” between the mill owners and their employees.¹¹ At the time of this speech, paternalism was a dying strategy in mills across the South. However, in the case of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company paternalism saw a resurgence in the 1950s and

⁹ Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, 122-138.

¹⁰ Reuben Robertson Sr., “No.20 Notes,” Reuben Robertson Collection, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Ramsey Library, May 1, 1959.

¹¹ Hall, *Like A Family*, 179-180.

even strengthened under the new leadership of Reuben Robertson Sr.'s son, Reuben Robertson Jr.

Reuben Robertson Sr., son in law to the owner of the mother branch of the Champion Company in Ohio, Peter G. Thomson, was eager to manage his own division of Champion in the South. Peter G. Thomson saw the benefits of expanding Champion, and funded the development of a Southern branch realizing that the vast forestation of Western North Carolina would increase productivity and would reduce shipping costs of the raw materials to the Ohio division of Champion Company if they were first processed in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Reuben Robertson Sr. was appointed by Thomson to oversee the construction of the Southern branch of the Champion, and with the help of Peter Damtoft, the forester for Thomson's expansion into the South, the two scouted out a small town in North Carolina located on the Pigeon River, Canton. Despite the small size of Canton's Pigeon River, Thomson and Robertson alike were heart-set on the location due to the immense forests surrounding the area on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains.¹²

In 1908, Peter Thomson officially opened the North Carolina division of the Champion Company importing the majority of its initial roughly five hundred workers into Canton from Italy and Bulgaria.¹³ The Champion Paper and Fibre Company in Canton, North Carolina was groundbreaking in the paper industry as it was the first paper mill to successfully bleach southern pine for conversion into high grade white papers.¹⁴

¹² "The Champion Fibre Company and Reforestation," Walter Julius Damtoft Collection, UNCA Library, Special Collections, 1926.

¹³ Jason Miller Thesis, "Labor Relations and Champion Fibre Company" (Senior Thesis, UNCA, 2001).

¹⁴ "The Champion Paper Fibre Company Canton Division: Breif History," Walter Julius Damtoft Collection, UNCA Library: Special Collections, November, 1931.

The Canton paper mill had a noble beginning built off giving the opportunity of the “American Dream,” to its employees. Immigrant workers came to America to work for Champion to build a new life, a better life, while locals sought to gain economic prosperity by adhering to the new industrialization of the area. In 1908, Reuben Robertson Sr. began managing the Southern division of Champion Paper Company. With Robertson in charge, the mill employees initially worked eight hour days with low wages. Which was not common in mills, one textile mill employee noted that “millhands rose early in the morning, still tired from the day before. For ten, eleven, or twelve hours they walked, stretched, leaned, and pulled at their machines.”¹⁵

The market of a mill village centered around Canton’s Main Street allowed for manageable livings for Champion employees. The mill village was an extension of the production of the factory itself providing convenience, comfort, and security.¹⁶ For years under Robertson Sr.’s leadership workers had not complained about their hours or their wages, largely due to the family environment that Robertson instilled in the mill. Robertson regularly patrolled the mill, chatting with workers and becoming a part of the community that was built for his employees. *The Log*, a monthly journal produced by Champion, both in Hamilton, Ohio and Canton, North Carolina confirmed the paternalistic strategy imposed upon Canton’s mill, as every issue beginning in 1921 was headed with this brief statement, “Published by ‘The Champion Family’ as a symbol of the co-operation and good fellowship. Existing at the plant of the Champion Fibre

¹⁵ Hall, *Like A Family*, Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 172.

Company, Canton, North Carolina.”¹⁷ Thomson aimed to create a connected family of Champion employees with the immediate “families” of Canton Champions and Ohio Champions, working as though they were cousins. Each issue of *The Log* sent out to Champion employees, both Canton and Hamilton alike, contained a section of general news that applied to all Champions, followed by specific updates relating to each respective location. This monthly journal was used to keep employees connected with one another, within their own mill and across state lines with distant members of the “Champion Family.”¹⁸

At the end of the day though, regardless of how much Peter G. Thomson or Reuben Robertson Sr. invested in and cared about their Champion “families,” it was the development and the strength of the mill that was their biggest concerns, particularly when it came to increasing production and profit. In January of 1924, Robertson changed his employees’ shifts from eight hours per day to eleven and even in some cases to thirteen hours, while concurrently decreasing the amount of wages by ten percent.¹⁹

This drastic alteration to working conditions sparked a large controversy in Canton and was met with great opposition. Labor organizers surged into the community. At this time Canton’s division of the Champion Company was growing to become the largest paper mill in the world.²⁰ Unionizers were hoping to break major ground in the South by entering and unionizing Reuben Robertson Sr.’s industry. Outraged with the new working conditions employees began affiliating with the American Federation of Labor, the International

¹⁷ *The Log*, Canton, North Carolina.

¹⁸ *The Log*, Canton, North Carolina.

¹⁹ “Plant is Closed Pending Result of Union Action,” *Asheville Citizen Times*, 17 January 1924, 1.

²⁰ “The Champion Paper Fibre Company Canton Division: Breif History,” Walter Julius Damtoft Collection, UNCA Library: Special Collections, November, 1931.

Papermaker's Union, and the International Brotherhood of Sulphite Workers. While waiting for organizers from the national headquarters of the major unions to arrive in Canton, Reuben Robertson Sr. unexpectedly closed the plant on January 16, 1924 and traveled north. The very next day the *Asheville Citizen Times* released an article revealing that the, "Plant Is Closed Pending Result of Union Action."²¹ Robertson claimed that the closing of the plant had nothing to do with the strong sentiment for unionization. However, his actions speak otherwise as major industries purposefully drove South to avoid the unionization that was occurring in the North. From a paternalistic perspective, he was demonstrating his authority similar to that of a father disciplining his children, as though he was saying, "If we cannot all play nice, then we cannot play at all."²²

Reuben Robertson Sr. disappeared after shutting the mill down. Rumors were that he had traveled to Cincinnati, but the Canton community was unsure and were waiting upon his arrival to negotiate the tension between the now unionized members of the mill and the mill officials. The closure of the mill affected the entire community and its merchants, even affecting business at the collieries of Coal Creek, Tennessee and Champion's lime mills in Knoxville.²³ In an article released by the *Asheville Citizen Times*, local merchants expressed their support of the unionized workers, partly in fear of an uncertain future, and in hopes that Canton would return to normal. The article explains that with the mill shut down, Canton was vastly different than it had ever been. Each day the mill remained closed tensions grew and uncertainty roamed rampant as the community became eager for a resolve.²⁴

²¹ "Plant Is Closed Pending Result of Union Action," *Asheville Citizen Times*, January 17, 1924.

²² John Kleinig, *Paternalism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, Publishers, 1984), 143-176.

²³ "The Men Behind the Plant" *The Log*, Vol. III, No. 2, July, 1924.

²⁴ "Big Canton Mill Is Still Closed; Barry There Yet," *Asheville Citizen Times*, January 30, 1924.

In February, Robertson announced that the plant would remain closed until “business conditions warrant operations similar to that carried on in the past.”²⁵ It had then been determined that Sr. was meeting with a conference of papermaking officials in Cincinnati and his announcement came upon his return home. Robertson Sr. made every effort to downplay the involvement of the American Federation of Labor claiming that the employees need not picket as every department was down and no effort was being made to renew operation, that the decision to close the mill was unrelated and was made strictly due to changes in the paper-making economy. Mr. F.B. Barry, president of the International Papermaker’s Union asserted that, “There is not a strike on in Canton... This should be made clear, if anything it is a lock-out.”²⁶ It was perceived as a strike because of the union involvement, but Reuben Robertson Sr. still held the power, and in this statement Mr. Barry made that clear. Mr. Barry had hoped to bring a drawn-out battle over worker’s rights to Canton, but the lock-out simply drained the community economically, as well as emotionally and mentally, so drastically that there was not enough support and it was apparent that Robertson would prevail in an already anti-union South.²⁷

The community became so desperate for resolution that by late February tensions grew to the point that the North Carolina Governor, Cameron A. Morrison, was ready to send troops to Canton to ensure that violence did not break out. The Governor sent, Major Gordon Smith, to evaluate the situation. By the time Major Smith arrived Reuben Robertson had announced that the mill would re-open soon. Robertson claimed that union sympathizers could return to their job. However, under no circumstance would Champion recognize the union. An article’s subheading read, “All is quiet in the Haywood County town, despite rumors that situation there

²⁵ Partial clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*, February 4, 1924.

²⁶ Clipping from assumed *Asheville Citizen Times* article, estimated date of February 5, 1924, archives at Canton Historical Museum.

²⁷ Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times* article estimated date of February 5, 1924, archives at Canton Historical Museum.

was tense.”²⁸ Reuben reopened the Canton paper mill during the second week of March, restoring the eight hour days with the employee wages of the former year.²⁹ However, in order for employees who signed up for the union to return to Champion they were required to give up their union membership.³⁰

The Southern perspective on unionization at this time can be found in an editorial from the *Asheville Citizen Times* entitled, “Peace at Canton.” The author demonstrated the anti-union sentiment shared among southerners, blaming the outside influences of labor organizers for the source of all their troubles, largely ignoring the harsher conditions that were being put in place in the Canton mill. This author stated that the workers in Canton had regained their senses in recognizing the relationship between employer and employee. Making the claim that, “It was not until the outsider stepped in and attempted to lead the Canton men that they got into trouble. The labor organizer is an agitator and his presence in a community simply means industrial warfare.”³¹

The Strike of 1924 was less about employees challenging paternalism, and more about the strength of Sr.’s paternalistic strategy flexing its power to ward off unionization. Developing such a large industry would attract a strong force for unionization, however by placing it in the heart of the South with a people who resented unionizers he was strengthening a paternalistic model in Canton where the community came to rely on the Champion Fibre Company and the future of Canton ran parallel with the future of the paper mill.

²⁸ Partial Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*, March. 14th, 1924, archives at Canton Historical Museum.

²⁹ Partial Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*, March. 14th, 1924, archives at Canton Historical Museum.

³⁰ *Asheville Citizen Times*, “Strained Conditions at Canton May Result in Order for Troops,” February 29, 1924.

³¹ Editorial Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*, “Peace at Canton,” March 13, 1924.

Billy Borne, "The Road to Happiness," Image. *Asheville Citizen Times*, March 14, 1924.



The acceptance of Canton being a paternalistic mill town is best expressed through a political cartoon (pictured above) created by Billy Borne and presented in the *Asheville Citizen*

Times as a response to the end of the Champion Strike of 1924 that depicts the anti-union mentality of the South. We see “labor” and “capital” walking together down the road of harmony and mutual prosperity while “Ma’ Canton” turns her back to the “Labor Organizer” leaving town.³²

Reuben Robertson Sr. did learn a great deal from his experience with the Strike of 1924 on how to keep a working body content and in line. Sr. began taking measures to strengthen the relationship between the community and his company. By the time the strike had occurred Robertson had already developed a thriving mill village named, “Fibreville,” on the western side of the mill. Fibreville contained roughly sixty small dwellings at first, but as the mill gained success and the population rose, further development was necessary. Canton was barely a town prior to the paper mill with a population of two hundred and thirty in 1900. Just two years after the installment of the Champion Fibre Company, in 1910, the town population grew to over thirteen hundred residents. By 1931, Canton had developed into an industrial town with over six thousand in population.³³

The success of a mill town relied heavily on a strong mill village that would provide employees convenience, comfort, and pleasure. This meant that in a single industry town where the majority of the town population worked in the mill that the remaining population had to work jobs that benefitted the community. Commonly in single industry communities roughly seventy-five percent of the mill town’s population worked for the mill, while the remaining twenty-five

³² Billy Borne, “The Road to Happiness” Image, *Asheville Citizen Times*, March 14, 1924.

³³ E.M. Ball, “Champion Paper, Politics, and the Pigeon River Controversy: History of Champion’s Canton Mill” UNCA, Special Collections, accessed September 28, 2014., <http://www.unc.edu/~a100mark/Champion/story/pagetwo.html>

percent provided general needed services in the fields of civic service, education, government, and healthcare.³⁴

A major development that Robertson Sr. introduced to the area was Canton's YMCA, a driving and lasting force for community unification as it provided entertainment for the mill employees' entire families. Sr. delivered a speech in 1959 to the Canton YMCA nostalgically addressing the inspiration and reasoning for the development for the Y and to pay homage to Peter G. Thomson for without which the Canton mill and what came to be known as the "Robertson Y" would have never existed. He poetically proclaimed, "Labor [is] your friends and your neighbors, it's fathers, brothers and husbands with mothers and sweethearts and wives who love and hate, who dream and who wait, it's real people living their lives... Labor means flesh and blood men..."³⁵ Sr. noted that it was the family-first attitude of his father-in-law Peter G. Thomson who sparked this mentality claiming, "Consideration for fellow workers has become a Champion tradition," passed down through the Thomson family tree.³⁶ In this same speech, Sr. detailed the success of the "Y" in Canton, indicating its exponential growth over the years in its attendees coming to an average of four hundred thousand attendees each year at its peak.³⁷ Needless to say Canton's YMCA was a successful tool in community unification. It is was also a successful tool in its contribution to the mill, in that pulp and paper programs were created to teach individuals how to operate machinery and learn the papermaking process as to better prepare them for a future career in the Champion mill.³⁸

³⁴Rex A. Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 16.

³⁵"'Y' 40th year speech 1959", Reuben Robertson Collection, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Ramsey Library, May 1, 1959.

³⁶"'Y' 40th Year Speech 1959."

³⁷"'Y' 40th year speech 1959."

³⁸Allen Roudebush, ed., *Memoirs of Reuben Robertson Sr.*, Vol. 2, 1990.

Similar to the YMCA, Sr. also gave the area Camp Hope, named after his wife Hope Robertson, a camp located on a beautiful location in an adjacent area called Bethel. He had agreed to purchase the land and donate it to his employees as long as the community built a clubhouse on the property. Robertson Sr. was a man of his community, willing to provide the funding if they were willing to build and better develop the area. Upon completion of the clubhouse on the grounds, Sr. then donated the camp to his recently established YMCA. In Camp Hope's early history it was said to be "the finest camp for boys and girls in Western North Carolina."³⁹

Paternalism only works with a strong and reliable figurehead overseeing operations, who can lead his industry progressively and sternly while simultaneously providing for his community with the endearing and caring demeanor. Reuben Robertson Sr. was a wealthy and successful businessman, but he was also a humble philanthropist who hoped to see people around him prosper and live joyous lives. In Canton, he carried on the humanitarian ideals that were put forth in Ohio by Peter G. Thomson. Sr. was the epitome of industrial paternalism, developing such a revolutionary mill that was the first in many fields and at one point was the largest paper mill in the world, while at the same time building a community of workers who cared more about just themselves, a community that became a family. "He was one of that rare breed of businessmen who could be found in the factory talking shop with his employees, and he was not superficial about it, but talked and listened with knowledge and concern. Old-timers insist that Robertson let it be known that his office door was open to any employee who had something to say, good or bad."⁴⁰

³⁹ Greenstone Media, "Camp Hope" Last modified 2014, accessed September 28, 2014, <http://cantonnnc.com/camp-hope>.

⁴⁰ Richard A. Bartlett, "Troubled Waters: Champion International and the Pigeon River Controversy," 46.

Reuben Robertson Sr.'s humanitarianism could be found all throughout Canton and its neighboring communities, from his development of one of the nicest YMCA's in Western North Carolina to his donations with the Boy Scouts of America at Camp Daniel Boone just a few miles south of the Champion mill. For instance the small lake, Lake Allen, located in the heart of Camp Daniel Boone is a man-made lake that's creation was funded by the Champion Company, allowing for the camp to include aquatics programs such as canoeing, fishing, swimming, and lifeguarding.⁴¹

It could be seen in the population of Canton, as few had not in some way or another benefitted from Sr.'s generosity. Citizens of Canton in need often received some type of welfare from the Champion Company, however, the Canton community knew that Robertson Sr. was the benefactor that allotted funds to those in need. One of the many examples was that of a widowed wife of a former Champion employee, living alone in a house that was falling apart. A collection was initiated and donated into by the Champion Company and its employees to fund the renovation of this widow's home. Fifty-five employees had donated, as well as a large contribution coming from the Company itself, and twenty-four of the Champion men volunteered their time on their days off to rebuild and restructure her home. Sr. wrote letters to his employees acknowledging and gratifying them for living by the Champion Spirit, always willing to help those in need.⁴² Sr.'s generosity was felt far and wide within Canton, and he found it most satisfying seeing the community "pay it forward." He invested in scholarship programs and local education, and genuinely wanted to see Western North Carolina grow and become successful.⁴³ The Robertson's generosity reached beyond just Canton, for in 1951

⁴¹ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, November 23, 2014.

⁴² "Good Neighbors at Canton," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, Vol. XXXI No. 5, May, 1950.

⁴³ Bartlett, 46.

Asheville High School was having financial trouble, for which Sr. wrote to the headmaster, “the Robertson men folks feel that we should have at least some part in helping you to meet the School’s financial problem.”⁴⁴ The letter announced that the headmaster would receive three \$333.35 checks from Robertson Sr., Jr. and Jr.’s brother, Logan.

Aside from walking the mill and interacting with his employees Robertson Sr. and the Champion community alike were able to keep up with one another through the mill produced monthly journals *The Log*, and the weekly articles, *Chips*, both of which provided a variety of news occurring in Canton, from employee league bowling scores to updates in major changes or events occurring within the mill. These articles included the announcement of new employees joining the “Champion Family,” and biographies on these new individuals, making them feel welcomed and appreciated. *The Log* and *Chips* would often be littered with pictures of infants who had also recently joined the “Champion Family.” The Champion paper mill embodied paternalism in every aspect as each employee was connected to one another and knew each other as though they had been raised by the same mother and father.⁴⁵

Both Champion produced publications also gave a lot of appreciation for the “Old-Timers” of the community, the retired mill workers. In almost every article there is some type of update about what the “Old-Timers” of Canton were doing in their much deserved retirement. Some articles contained announcements of retirement, formally inducting these employees into the honored group of “Old-Timers.” One article of *The Log* shares the personal letter of one Champion employee, J.E. Slaughter, who wrote to Reuben Robertson Sr. announcing his retirement. He emphasized that he thoroughly enjoyed his twenty-seven year long career at

⁴⁴ “Letter to Headmaster of Asheville School,” Reuben Robertson Collection, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Ramsey Library, June 6 1951.

⁴⁵ “24 New Champions Added to Carolina Division Payroll,” *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Canton, North Carolina, Vol. 14, No. 23, March 25, 1959.

Champion and always felt that he was given a square deal—curiously, this employee had worked there during the harsh conditions raised during 1924—however he ended his letter with, “Hoorah! For Old Champion.” Sr. responded with a truly personal handwritten letter that thanked Slaughter for his years of dedicated service to Champion and an official invitation to join the retired “elder statesmen” of Champion Employees.⁴⁶ This type of attentiveness to employees is unheard of for businessmen at the level of Reuben Robertson Sr., many men who had reached such a prominent leadership role often forgot about the working men.

Reuben Robertson Sr. had an appreciation for his employees, and he expressed that appreciation through different strategies. As the testament above demonstrates, employees enjoyed working for Robertson Sr. and many members of the “Champion Family,” had been there for years. Robertson Sr. was opposed to unionization, but he gave incentives to employees who remained with the mill for a long period of time, guaranteeing an “old age bonus,” as he called it, by which an employee’s pay was increased by 5% every five years up to twenty-five years of employment.⁴⁷ This made employees feel valued and reduced employee turnover. A high turnover was common and expected in most mills. Industries with a high turnover rate had a consistent cycle of new-hires with fewer employees gaining bonuses, allowing for less money to be dedicated to the collective employee payroll and can be distributed elsewhere in the company. Canton’s payroll was higher than other mills in the Southeast, but the practice of the incremental raises made the mill much more stable, instead of having a consistent flow of new unexperienced workers, Canton’s workforce were experienced and grew to be lifetime members of the

⁴⁶ “Old Timer’s Letter Reflects The Lasting Spirit of Canton,” *The Log*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, January, 1950.

⁴⁷ “Oral History Interview with Reuben B. Robertson and E.L. Demmon,” Reuben Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, Feb 15, 1959.

Champion family.⁴⁸ Champion may have been paying their employees more than others mills collectively, but in doing so a sheltered community was built, a family of employees, that provided for itself and the community. There was an appreciation of workers from the mill seeing them as more than just operators of machines who were indispensable, but instead as honored members of the Champion family who paid their dues to the betterment of the community. Champion through Robertson's paternalistic strategy of a stronger appreciation of the people of the mill over the profit and production of the mill had the full support of his employees and the community.

In 1945, Robertson Sr. created and would later become a member of the Snug Harbor Group, a gathering of retired Champions who met regularly and partook in discussions and varying activities—this group still exists today, and currently meets on a bi-weekly schedule.⁴⁹ Sr. always tried to find new ways to appreciate the Champion employees who built, embodied, and brought the industry to know such success. In the March of 1950, Reuben Robertson Sr. held a ceremony honoring the “Old-Timers” of the Champion Paper and Fiber Company, giving each Champion a ring with the Champion logo with different types of precious stones representing their years of service: a diamond ring for forty years of service, emerald for thirty-five, ruby for thirty, and so on.⁵⁰

A great testament of Reuben Robertson Sr.'s paternalism came during World War II, where other mills throughout the nation were struggling and turnover rates per month were ten to fifteen percent, Canton's turnover percentage was less than one percent.⁵¹ During World War II,

⁴⁸ Ball, “Champion Paper, Politics, and the Pigeon River Controversy: History of Champion's Canton Mill”

⁴⁹ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, April 7, 2014.

⁵⁰ “Champions New Service Emblems,” *The Log*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, Canton, North Carolina, March 1950.

⁵¹ “Oral History Clip #2,” E.M. Ball, D.H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville.

Sr. orchestrated Christmas boxes to send to Champion employees who were serving overseas. The boxes contained articles of *The Log* to allow servicemen to keep up with their Champion Family, articles from *Reader's Digest*, and a cigarette lighter. Sergeant First Class, Edgar Hawkins wrote to *The Log*, along with many other servicemen, expressing his appreciation stating, "I was quite surprised to receive the nice Christmas package.—My job with Champion was the best I ever had. Also thank you for the cigarette lighter. Hope to be back on my old job soon."⁵² Many employees expressed their surprise in their former employers' generosity as this level of generosity from an industrial giant was unfamiliar to most. Sr. built personal relationships with his employees, and truly believed in the "Champion Family."

A few short years after World War II, Robertson Sr. became Board Chairman over the Canton division and the presidency over the company was passed on to his son, Reuben Robertson Jr., allowing paternalism in Canton to continue and strengthen with Sr.'s successor, embodying paternalism by "keeping it in the family." Paternalism was so prevalent in the Champion divisions as the company presidents had always been either a Thomson, or a Robertson—who had married into the Thomson family—dating back to Champion's birth in 1893.⁵³ The Champion Paper and Fibre Company historically was an abnormality in the paper mill industry, but also throughout all of the varying mills in the South--Champion was unique. The Strike of 1924 was one of the earliest organized strikes involving labor organizers in southern industries, other southern industries found strikes more common roughly ten years after the strike in Canton, in the 1930s.⁵⁴ Other mills in the South who thrived on the paternalistic

⁵² "Letters from Champion Men in the Armed Service," *The Log*, Vol. XXVI, No. 12., January 1945.

⁵³ "Father and Son—The Two Top Executives of Champion," May, 1950, Clipping from *Fortune Magazine*. Reuben Robertson Collection, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Ramsey Library, May 1950.

⁵⁴ Griffith, 18.

model found paternalism dying out in the 1950s through a variety of reasons, including modernization and technological advancements, as well as changes in political structures.⁵⁵ However, Champion again remained an oddity in industries in the South as Jr. maintained Champion's paternalistic environment through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

Reuben Robertson Jr.'s generosity, intelligence, and ambition matched, if not exceeded his fathers', whom he learned and harvested those values that lead to him being as successful as he was. Jr. had a special relationship with his father and was always quick to show his appreciation for the life that his father had built for him. Reuben Robertson Jr. was highly successful throughout his life. As a student at Yale University, he was an All-American and Captain of the Soccer Team. While on break at Yale Reuben Robertson Jr. wrote to his father applying for a job in the Canton mill during his winter break. Reuben Jr. applied for a three week period as an engineer at Champion claiming that he had a great deal of experience and was currently making a one hundred in his engineering class at Yale. He ended his letter to his father signing, "Expecting a suitable salary, I remain, respectfully Reuben Robertson Jr."⁵⁶ Robertson Jr. was always respectful with his father, while also reminding him that they were cut from the same cloth and playfully giving him a hard time.

Jr. grew to become a highly successful military man during World War II, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the army. Reuben's military success did not end there as he was a driving force on many post-war time coalitions, in that in 1955 while running the Champion Fibre Company he was appointed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to the position of Deputy

⁵⁵ Lee J. Alston and Joseph P. Ferrie, *Southern Paternalism and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13-48.

⁵⁶ "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 5.

Secretary of Defense.⁵⁷ This position meant that if the United States Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson, was unable to perform his duties that Reuben would then step in, which occurred on multiple occasions. However, to Eisenhower's regret, Jr. resigned from the position in 1957 to return to his duties as the President of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company. In Eisenhower's return letter accepting Robertson's resignation, he stated that he hoped to work together with him on future government projects and for Jr. to visit the next time he was in Washington D.C.⁵⁸ It was rumored that if Reuben Robertson Jr. had not passed away unexpectedly that he was primed to be the Vice Presidential nominee for the Republican ticket running with Richard Nixon, as Nixon had developed a close personal relationship with the Robertson family, and Robertson Jr. had a hearty resume under his belt.⁵⁹ Martin A. Coyle, chairman of the Butler County Republican Committee, who would later be a delegate to the party's nominating convention reported that, "he was aware that extensive plans had been made by top Republicans in the country to consider Mr. Robertson as a strong potential candidate for the vice presidency on the GOP ticket."⁶⁰

Jr. gained great experiences in his early life, but he accredited his success to his parents, claiming to have gained his business and people skills from his father, for which he was forever thankful. He had planned to pick up where his father had left off, integrating himself into the paternalistic system within Champion and adapting the model that was already in place into a newer and better Champion.⁶¹ Robertson Jr. had immense respect for his father, and was always attentive to the lessons in life and business that Sr. had to offer. Images of the Robertson men

⁵⁷ "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 24.

⁵⁸ Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 24.

⁵⁹ "Letter from Vice-President Nixon", Reuben Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, August 15, 1956.

⁶⁰ "From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994" Article. < <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Reuben-Robertson/52612223>>.

⁶¹ "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 10.

together often portrayed them in a different light. A perspective that the media rarely captured, the joyous nature of a father and son, as well as the respect between one another. Although the media and the world rarely saw these sides of these two paper-making pioneers, the Champion Family had the pleasure of experiencing these types of interaction frequently as both men were known to patrol the mill and immerse themselves into the local community, showing their appreciation for what their Champion employees meant to the company.⁶²

A great deal of Jr.'s perceived paternalism was actually a spillover of programs that Sr. placed in Canton, largely due to the YMCA which Robertson Sr. developed for the Canton community in 1919.⁶³ Not to say that Jr. did not introduce his own paternalistic methods, but upon his initial presidency of the Champion Company he had to strengthen the status quo that had been instilled by his father. In 1951, just after Jr. took over, the Canton YMCA held a family friendly target shooting competition at Camp Hope. At this event it was announced that Champion would fund new and additional construction to the camp.⁶⁴ Jr. inherited the same paternalistic approach to his community that his father did, strengthening the YMCA and the Boy Scouts. Under Sr.'s presidency, the YMCA offered pulp and paper classes, to encourage young members of the community to join the Champion Family. Jr. took this one step further by introducing two Junior Achievement companies to Canton and Waynesville High School students as "youth training" centers equipped with power saws, sanders, drill presses, and many more tools. These companies gave students the hands-on experience that they would need to enter the job market of the emerging 1960s.⁶⁵

⁶² "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 33-35.

⁶³ "YMCA's 40th Anniversary" Reuben B. Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, 1959.

⁶⁴ "Target Shooting at Camp Hope," *The Log*, Vol XXXIV, No. 1, January, 1951.

⁶⁵ "JA Comes to Canton: Units Are Now Operating Locally," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*: Vol. 14, No. 4, November 12, 1958.

Jr. continued production of *Chips* and *The Log*. Through these mill-produced and supervised articles, Champion promoted community activities like hunting, bowling, softball, football, and music. Sr. stressed that through these mill-produced publications that, “We wanted every worker to be ‘saturated’ with the managerial view point.”⁶⁶ Jr. kept these publications under his presidency of the Champion Company, bringing updates of the business and of the community to his fellow Champions. For example, in 1954 *Log* articles consisted of a variety of stories that brought the community together and brought Champions closer to their company. These headlines included “Social Feast for Firemen,”⁶⁷ to honoring a “Retiring Old Timer,”⁶⁸ with a fishing tackle gift from the department he worked in, as well as more managerial type updates on Champions’ financial progress such as, “Since War, \$60 million to \$129 million,” showcasing that the Champion Paper Company more than doubled its’ profits during America’s challenging wartime economy.⁶⁹ Although the financial update was published in *The Log*, employees were well aware of this news, as Robertson Jr. went through the Canton mill and jubilantly announced the news to his Champion employees and personally thanked as many as he could.⁷⁰

Although Jr.’s home was in Ohio, Mike Faber of the Ohio Division proclaimed that, “Reuben was out in the mill every chance he could get... He would meet a person and five years later be able to recall his name and everything about him.”⁷¹ It was relatively unheard for mill owners not to live in close proximity of their industry, however, Jr. did just that. Jr. was a highly busy man, who “made every moment count...” In one instance he traveled from Hamilton, Ohio

⁶⁶ Allen Roudebush, ed., *Memoirs of Reuben Robertson Sr.*, Vol. 2, 1990.

⁶⁷ “Social Feast for Firemen” *The Log*, Vol XXXVII, No. 5, May, 1954.

⁶⁸ “Retiring Old Timer” *The Log*, Vol XXXVII, No. 6, June, 1954.

⁶⁹ “Since War, \$60 Million to \$129 Million” *The Log*, Vol XXXVII, No. 8, August, 1954.

⁷⁰ “Since War, \$60 Million to \$129 Million” *The Log*, Vol XXXVII, No. 8, August, 1954.

⁷¹ “Memorial Edition,” *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 36.

to meetings in Pittsburgh, New York City, and Buffalo, and then back to New York City, all in one day. The following day, he arrived in Pasadena, Texas to assist their division of Champion with problems they were facing for a meeting at nine in the morning.⁷² There was no doubt that Jr. was a driven man, but his output and production was a testament to his ambitious lifestyle. He was able to run the Canton mill and travel all over the nation for Champion business largely due to his wealth. For he had a personal plane that allowed him to live such a hectic, but still somehow managed, lifestyle. Though rarely used, due to wind conditions in the mountainous area, Jr. had a landing strip installed just above Lake Logan, just some miles away from the Canton mill. Despite this, he would typically land in Asheville when coming to the Canton mill.⁷³

Even though Jr. did not live in the Canton community, he genuinely cared about people, particularly his Champion Family, and sought to build positive relationships with all he encountered. There was a philosophy shared in Champion that Jr. worded so eloquently, “It is not our machines, our buildings, our money or our materials that make the difference between success and failure. It is the people in our company that determine how successful we are.”⁷⁴

In other industries, particularly Southern industries, paternalism was quickly being forced out by the technological advances and industrialization leading into the 1950s.⁷⁵ In some Southern textile mills, the update in machinery meant a lessened need of such a large and experienced employee staff, turnover rates were already high in most Southern mills, but with

⁷² “Memorial Edition,” *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 18.

⁷³ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, November 22, 2014.

⁷⁴ “Memorial Edition,” *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 37.

⁷⁵ Rex A. Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 389- 412.

the introduction of modernized machinery mills were needing fewer and fewer employees.⁷⁶ As employees began getting laid off in large quantities, the urge to unionize became a necessity for some mill workers to keep their jobs. However, this was not the case in Canton. The mill was constantly being advanced and modernized, but this did not concern Champion employees as Jr. placed a focus on the people that made up Champion and accredited Champion's success to its employees over anything else. Jr. held off unionization in his lifetime as president of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company through a genuine appreciation of each and every Champion in Canton, by making each employee feel important in contributing to their Champion Family, a sentiment that Jr. inherited from his father.

While Jr. continued his fathers' forms of paternalism, he also introduced his own community-tightening strategies that kept labor organizers at bay. Both father and son focused on improving education in Canton, with investments in community education programs ranging back to Champion's earliest histories. Jr. funded the development of a Town Library that served the community for years, and now holds the Canton Historical Museum.⁷⁷ Jr. would introduce Canton's mill with the Chapaco Council and an Employment Security Plan, both insuring benefits to Champion employees. Robertson Sr. delivered a speech in 1959 describing the Chapaco Council as "a result-getting team that has become the envy... to a host of American manufacturers regardless of what they make."⁷⁸ The Chapaco Council was a meeting of representatives of each department within the Canton mill to propose ideas and suggestions to improve the mill. This was very similar to the modern union, except that the representatives were chosen by Robertson Jr., and though it was perceived as a way for employees to have a voice in

⁷⁶ Daniel Clark, *Like Night & Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill*, (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Chapel Hill Press, 1997), 27-31.

⁷⁷ "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 36.

⁷⁸ "Speech to Chapaco Council," Reuben Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, 1959.

the mill, the power and final decisions were still at Jr.'s discretion.⁷⁹ The most notable addition to Champion's financial relationship with its employees was the advent of profit sharing.⁸⁰

In order to continue the success of paternalism under new leadership new methods and strategies must be emplaced that tighten the community's relationship with the industry. Jr. did just that with his addition of profit sharing. Profit sharing pulls a percentage of the profits of the company and distributes them among employees. Employees with longevity received more than more recently hired employees. This provided incentives to employees to stay with the company, that their wages will be raised, and they will receive higher percentages of Champion's profit sharing as they maintain their relationship with the company. Profit sharing pulled the tight-knit Canton community even closer together for a common goal in the betterment of the mill for higher profits so that they entire Champion staff can reap the benefits.⁸¹

Jr. expanded the "Champion Family," which found its heart in Canton, but reached out to benefit lime miners as far as Knoxville Tennessee and coal miners in Coal Creek, Tennessee. It was a paternalistic goal of both Robertson men to build the local economy and lessen their impact on the forestry of the area. In February of 1960 Reuben developed a relationship with ten sawmills encompassing the Champion Fibre Company to reduce waste of valuable forest by converting waste slabs, dished out and often unused by these sawmills, into woodchips that could be extracted and used to make paper in the Champion mill.⁸²

⁷⁹ Doug Gibson, interview by author, Canton, NC: AFL-CIO USW Smoky Mountain Local 507 Office, November 24, 2014.

⁸⁰ "Memorial Edition," *The Log*, Vol XLIII, No. 4, April, 1960, 37.

⁸¹ Kleinig, *Paternalism*, 195-197.

⁸² "Sawmills Converting Waste Slabs Into Profitable Chips for Paper Under New Plan at Champion," *Waynesville Mountaineer*, Vol. 75, No. 13, February 15, 1960.

Prior to World War II, the research divisions from the different Champion branches were looking to improve the quality of Champion's paper production, fine tuning a product they called KromeKote—which would be regarded as “the Cadillac of fine printing papers.”⁸³ Robertson Jr. was the strongest advocate of this research and once developed became its biggest promoter. Jr. vigorously promoted the development of KromeKote as well as the expansion of the product into KromeKote Colorcast, and the more refined CastCoat which had the same qualities of KromeKote but was coated on both sides of the paper. Kromekote was a shinier and thicker type of paper that brought better resolution to images.⁸⁴ KromeKote and its expansion would become the “life blood” of the Hamilton mill.⁸⁵

"Reuben had notions about getting Kromekote everywhere... Until after World War II, Champion didn't have any international business, and Reuben had expansion on his mind."⁸⁶ Jr. had hoped to expand the Champion brand into Brazil and started operation in a plant near Sao Paulo in 1959, which was on the verge of success until drastic political and economic changes surfaced in the Brazilian government.⁸⁷ The success of Kromekote in Hamilton was the “coming of age” proof to his Champion Family that Jr. was ready to take on more responsibility in the Champion industry.⁸⁸

In 1950, Jr. entered his role as president over Canton's mill in a fury, initiating profit sharing for employees, funding local organizations, while tightening and simultaneously expanding the Champion Family. Just a week after this profitable business plan was put forth Jr.

⁸³ “From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994,” Article, < <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Reuben-Robertson/52612223>>

⁸⁴ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, November 23, 2014.

⁸⁵ “From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994.”

⁸⁶ “From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994.”

⁸⁷ “From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994.”

⁸⁸ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, November 23, 2014.

announced plans to fully secure Champions' domain over Haywood County with the expansion of another Champion paper mill in the neighboring city of Waynesville claiming the expansion would begin sometime in March.⁸⁹ Champion's paternalistic nature had already entered into Waynesville with the close proximity to the Canton mill and the foundations that were put forth: the YMCA, Camp Hope, and the additions to Camp Daniel Boone all provided by Champion funding. However, with the addition of a Champion branch in Waynesville, Waynesville would soon become more reliant on the paper mill as it became a major job provider in the area.⁹⁰

Although Jr. did not bring his crowning achievement in the paper-making industry, Kromekote, with him to the Canton division of Champion, he further developed and critiqued the process that was used to make Kromekote to create a new plastic coating, called Thermokups, that had never been seen in the paper market. This plastic coating process became the primary product of the Waynesville division of Champion. With the advent of plastic coating Jr. had a far-reaching affect across America in various aspects of daily life, the most notable was the bottling of milk, which could now be placed in plastic coated cardboard rather than glass.⁹¹

Sadly, Reuben Robertson Jr. would not see the success of his Waynesville expansion as tragedy struck March 13th, 1960. Jr. was driving with his wife in Ohio when they came across a stranded motorist. Jr., well-known for his humanitarian lifestyle, halted his car and exited his vehicle to assist the driver. While walking to the broken down vehicle a drunk driver struck Jr. killing him upon impact.⁹²

⁸⁹ "Champion Ready to Buy Waynesville Plant: Expansion to Start March," *Waynesville Mountaineer*, Vol. 75, No. 20, February 22, 1960.

⁹⁰ "1951 Annual Report to Champions," Walter Julius Damtoft Collection, UNCA Library, 1951.

⁹¹ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, November 23, 2014.

⁹² "In Memoriam," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. XIX, No.6, March 15, 1960.

Retired Champions note that the entire environment of the Canton mill changed drastically on the news of Jr.'s death.⁹³ Three days after Jr.'s unexpected death, one employee reported to *Chips* that "the sadness in the mill is so thick you can cut it with a knife."⁹⁴ Former Canton Champion, Ed Baurer, remarked on Jr.'s death, "I just couldn't believe it. Later in the day, when I walked into the mill, I could tell everybody felt the same way. It was just like going into a morgue."⁹⁵ Another former Champion Bob Schaney affirmed, "The Champion family thing was big when Reuben Jr. was alive. After his death, when they started getting away from the Champion family attitude, employee attitudes changed."⁹⁶

Immediately following Reuben's catastrophic death the future of the Champion Company was in question. Karl Bendetsen was elected president of the mill just two days after Jr.'s death, marking the first time in the history of all of Champion's divisions that someone not related to Peter G. Thomson was president of a Champion branch.⁹⁷ Bendetsen's presidency marked the beginning of the end of paternalism in the Champion Paper and Fibre Company as he took Champion away from the employee focused model of business that the Robertson men had developed after so many years. Bendetsen cut Jr.'s profit sharing and replaced it with four to ten cent raises for every employee, four cents going to lower paid employees and up to ten cent raises to the wages of higher officials in the mill.⁹⁸

The paternalism model of business is similar to that of a family budget; in an article of *The Log*, Champion employees were asked if they kept a family budget, the contrasting

⁹³ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, April 16, 2014.

⁹⁴ "Unexpected and Devastating Loss," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. XIX, No. 11, March 16, 1960.

⁹⁵ "From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994."

⁹⁶ "From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994."

⁹⁷ "Champion Hamilton mill chronology, 1893-2005," Laurel Court, last modified January 2006, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.laurelcourt.com/champion-paper-timeline.html>.

⁹⁸ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, Sept. 30, 2014.

responses of two employees correspond to the contrasting perspectives of the Robertson's and of Bendetsen. The first employee stated, "Yes, we operate on a family budget. Each payday so much of our paycheck is set aside for expenses of the house, home, insurance, savings, etc. The remainder is used, after considerable discussion, to obtain something which will add to our convenience, comfort and pleasure," which models the Robertson's paternalistic operation of Champion, setting aside funds from the profits to ensure employee benefits, and then using the excess to benefit the community as a whole. The other employee stated in response, "In our case the answer is no! We let our income dictate our standard of living..." which parallels Bendetsen's model of operation. Bendetsen's model allowed employees to have direct control over their income, allowing them to purchase their own products of leisure and dictate their own personal benefits from the wages.⁹⁹

Bendetsen's operation over Champion brought a new age, sealing the end of the paternalistic nature of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company. Bendetsen's management of the mill brought uncertainty in job security, as he was less concerned with the individuals of Canton as the Robertsons were. On March 31st, 1961, Bendetsen laid off a third of the existing Champion Family in the Canton mill, this date became known in Canton as "Black Friday."¹⁰⁰

Bendetsen entered the Champion Company and the Champion Family became uneasy, their nerves were calmed with the occasional visits to Canton from Reuben Robertson Sr. who came out of retirement to help stabilize a tense environment brought on in Canton by the death of his son. In 1962, Sr. visited his former mill with a warm and hearty welcome from the Champion Family, as a banner draped across one of the entrances of the mill read, "Welcome back Mr.

⁹⁹ "Do You Keep A Family Budget?" *The Log*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 5, May, 1955.

¹⁰⁰ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, Sept. 30, 2014.

Champion!” Sr. walked the floors of his former mill, conversing with employees and bringing back the communal mood that had been instilled there over the generations. Upon his exit an article of *Chips* claimed, “It was like old times having Mr. Robertson among us. Hurry back RBR!”¹⁰¹

Sr.’s occasional visits were not enough to alleviate the rising tensions between employee and employer. The AFL-CIO recognized the immense changes occurring in Canton, and with the Carolina division under a non-Thomson related president saw their opportunity in rallying Champion employees for unionization. A vote on a union occurred in 1962, but overwhelming was turned down four-to-one.¹⁰² The Division Manager, W. M. Lehmkuhl released a sixty-two page booklet to hourly employees, as they were the most displeased with the direction that Champion was heading, which outlined the principles for each employee, the focus of the booklet had employees working freely and respecting one another, producing together in harmony. Lehmkuhl finished his announcement of the new booklet with an unsettling statement, “... We have proven over many years there is no need and there is no place for a union in our Carolina division.”¹⁰³

Another vote occurred in 1963, after a strong presence of the AFL-CIO. A *Chips* article claimed that a vote against the union would continue the tradition of employee and employer working relationships, better wages, and human relationships that Champion had developed in Canton. It indicated that a “yes” vote would represent all employees, including those who did not

¹⁰¹ “Mr. Robertson Visists,” *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 17, No. 37, June 27, 1962.

¹⁰² “AFL-CIO Union Again Asks for an Election,” *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 18, No. 36, June 19, 1963.

¹⁰³ “New Booklet Outlines Carolina Mill Policies,” *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 18, No. 37, June 26, 1963.

want to join the union.¹⁰⁴ Bendetsen and Luhmkuhl were desperately trying to keep unionization out of their mill as it was becoming apparent that the Champion Family had become opposed to the new leadership and the non-paternalistic management that was instilled in Canton's mill.

Luhmkuhl seemed very edgy on the topic of unionization, as just the thought of it led to anti-union propaganda in articles of *Chips*, and in speeches he gave. He was first to bring to light any and every positive topic about Champion that he could as to distract from the growing problem at hand. In 1964, he boasted that the production of paper in Canton's Champion hit an all-time high with nine hundred and ninety-three tons of top quality paper sent out to Champion customers.¹⁰⁵ An animated man, he gave a speech to the Canton Lion's Club in 1965 entitled, "A Crisis in Canton," where he blamed the "Outsiders," paid labor organizers of the AFL-CIO International Union of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers, as the problem in Canton, that they "could breed discord and distrust and could cause disaster, depression, and despair."¹⁰⁶ Lehmkuhl's impressive alliterative skills showed that Champion officials were losing ground in their fight to keep the union out of Canton. Despite Lehmkuhl's statistics and the union already losing in 1962 and 1963, and Champion's best production year to date in 1964, the union decision came up for a vote again in 1966.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ "All Champions Urged to Vote on Union Issue," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 18, No. 43, August 7, 1963.

¹⁰⁵ "Carolina Production Hits All-Time High," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 19, No. 33, August 7, 1963.

¹⁰⁶ "A Crisis in Canton," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 20, No. 13, January 13, 1965.

¹⁰⁷ "A Crisis in Canton," *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*, Vol. 20, No. 13, January 13, 1965.

Although the vote in 1966 was very close, the majority of votes fell for the installation of the union with the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers as their bargaining agent for wages, benefits, and working conditions.¹⁰⁸

Unionization Voting Statistics from 1966.

Votes For	841
Votes Against	726
Void	5
Challenged	8

“Majority of Employees Favor AFL-CIO Union,” <i>Chips</i> , Vol. 21, No. 30, May 11, 1966.
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With the official contract between the Champion Company and the Local 507 union of Canton on July 20, 1967 paternalism, in the business sense, had failed in the Champion Paper and Fibre Company. However, the community remained to practice much of the paternalistic ventures that the Robertsons had instilled in Canton, the tight-knit community may not have been as close and up-to-date with one another as they were under the presidencies of Robertson Sr. and Jr. through the means of *The Log* and *Chips*, however the community still banded together for common causes and carried on traditions that originated from the Robertson eras of Canton, from the weekly gatherings in the park where the community enjoys bluegrass song and dance to

¹⁰⁸ “Majority of Employees Favor AFL-CIO Union,” *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*: Vol. 21, No. 30, May 11, 1966.

the continued appreciation for the “Old Timers,” and their regular meetings and appearances at festivals and parades.¹⁰⁹

The Champion Company had a rich and unique history of using paternalism. As a means to ward off unionization, noting its success of climbing to be an industrial powerhouse at an earlier age than most Southern mills. Canton’s mill faced controversy at an earlier period than most Southern industries with the Strike of 1924, and resisted the tendencies of Operation Dixie in the 1950’s, holding off unionization until the mid-1960s. Nearly forty years of a strong paternalistic community held labor organizers off, but it came upon the unexpected death of Reuben Robertson Jr. that paternalism saw its end in Canton. Once the presidency of the Canton mill was “out of the family,” the family environment of the mill sizzled out. The entry of the union in 1967 solidified a new model of operation in Champion, abandoning the paternalistic business archetype. *Chips* articles continued for years to come, as strains of paternalism held on, providing the managerial perspective of the Champion Company to its Champions.¹¹⁰

Currently, ninety years after the Strike of 1924, the Canton mill is tense again and the threat of strike looms over the company—now, Evergreen Packaging. The union contract ran out in December and a demand for a better and fairer contract was made, it has been almost a year and progress on a new contract has yet to come. Canton’s Main Street is littered with union flyers with nearly every business proudly placing “Fair Contract Now!” posters in their windows, conversely this same street ninety years ago was littered with the Canton community bringing an end to the union uproar, and how the times have changed.

¹⁰⁹ Wayne Carson, interview by author, Canton, NC, Sept. 30, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Doug Gibson, interview by author, Canton, NC: AFL-CIO USW Smoky Mountain Local 507 Office, February 7, 2014.

From the Canton paper mill's beginning it was an oddity in labor in the South. In an interview with Robertson Sr. indicated that the development of the Canton mill was the first pulp and paper industry in the South coming roughly fifteen years prior to any other competition.¹¹¹ It was unique for a variety of reasons; its strike for unionization came prior to the unionization boom of the 1930s, it had many revolutionary firsts in many papermaking fields despite being located in such a small town, it held onto the paternalistic model longer than most every mill in the South, resisting the unionization drive of Operation Dixie, and if Reuben Robertson Jr. was not taken so unexpectedly that model probably would have lived on much longer than it did. The Champion Family was loyal to Reuben Robertson Jr. far beyond just their dependency on the Company for financial stability, they saw him as a true friend and mentor, and when he was no longer with the mill, the family environment was soon taken over by a more business-focused and less community-driven president. Jr. stressed the importance of his employees as they were what made Champion significant, whereas Bendetsen seemed more preoccupied with improving the stock value of the mill--a goal of both Robertson men as well, but not the perceived primary goal.¹¹² What set the Robertson's apart in the business field, aside from their revolutionary discoveries in the paper-making industry, one may ask? They shared the same principle that they had both delivered in speeches throughout the years, this was the heart of their operations as presidents of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company, as they always remembered that, "There is no indispensable man."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Elwood R. Maunder, "Interview with Reuben Robertson and E.L. Demmon," Reuben Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, Feb 15, 1959.

¹¹² "Champion Ups Dividends for First Time Since 1957," *Waynesville Mountaineer*, Vol. 82, No. 18, February 11, 1966.

¹¹³ "Speech to Masons at Pasadena," Reuben Robertson Collection, UNCA Library, 1960.

Annotated Works Cited

Primary Sources

Asheville Citizen Times. Periodical. Asheville, North Carolina: January, 1924-March, 1924.

The Asheville Citizen Times provides articles detailing the early history of the Canton paper mill, in particular the Strike that occurred in Canton in 1924. Even including illustrations that strengthen the non-union mentality shared by individuals of the South.

----- Borne, Billy. "The Road to Happiness." Image. Asheville Citizen Times. March 14, 1924.

----- Partial clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*. February 4, 1924.

----- Clipping from assumed *Asheville Citizen Times* article. estimated date of February 5, 1924.

----- Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times* article estimated date of February 5, 1924.

----- Partial Clipping from Asheville Citizen Times. March. 14th, 1924.

----- "Big Canton Mill Is Still Closed; Barry There Yet." January 30, 1924.

----- Editorial Clipping from *Asheville Citizen Times*, "Peace at Canton." March 13, 1924.

----- "Plant is Closed Pending Result of Union Action." January 17, 1924.

----- "Strained Conditions at Canton May Result in Order for Troops," February 29, 1924.

Ball, E.M. "Champion Paper, Politics, and the Pigeon River Controversy: History of Champion's Canton Mill." UNCA, Special Collections, accessed September 28, 2014.,

<<http://www.unc.edu/~a100mark/Champion/story/pagetwo.html>>

This collection of interviews and clips of oral histories shares the early history and relationships between employers and employees. It provides personal statements and accounts of Champion employees.

Carson, Wayne. Interview by Brannon Aughe. Canton, NC. Written notes.

-----. April 7, 2014.

-----. April 16, 2014.

-----. September 20, 2014.

-----. November 23, 2014.

Wayne Carson is the curator at the Canton Historical Museum, he is also a retired mill worker and was an employee there prior to the mill being officially unionize in the 1960's. Wayne has been a great source through understanding the workers' mentalities during that period.

Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company. Vol. 18- 20. 1958-1960.

Chips articles can be found at the Canton Historical Museum. *Chips* is a Canton news article created with the intent to show what is going on within the town around the paper mill as well as what was occurring within the mill. *Chips* shows the impact the mill has on the community in Canton throughout the Mill's history. *Chips* journals build the mentality shared by citizens of Canton in regards to the mill, the community, and later to the union.

----. "AFL-CIO Union Again Asks for an Election." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 18. No.36. June 19, 1963.

----. "All Champions Urged to Vote on Union Issue." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 18, No. 43. August 7, 1963.

----. "A Crisis in Canton." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 20, No. 13. January 13, 1965.

- . "Carolina Production Hits All-Time High." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 19, No. 33. August 7, 1963.
- . "In Memoriam." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 19. No.6. March 15, 1960.
- . "JA Comes to Canton... Units Are Now Operating Locally." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 14. N. 4. Canton, North Carolina: Champion Papers, November 12, 1958.
- . "Majority of Employees Favor AFL-CIO Union." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 21, No. 30. May 11, 1966.
- . "Mr. Robertson Visists." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 17, No. 37. June 27, 1962.
- . "New Booklet Outlines Carolina Mill Policies." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 18. No. 37. June 26, 1963.
- . "Unexpected and Devastating Loss." *Chips: The Champion Paper and Fibre Company*. Vol. 20, No. 11. March 16, 1960.

Damtoft, Walter J. Walter Julius Damtoft Collection, 1900-present. M2011.06.01-10 ;

OS2011.06.01-02. Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville. Asheville, North Carolina.

Walter Damtoft was a forester for the mill, though I have not fully searched this collection I have found goals from Reuben Robertson for Damtoft in making the Champion Fibre Company but also the surrounding territories the best company and the best land for that company. According to the Damtoft collection Robertson was trying to ensure that Western North Carolina's environment would remain healthy to benefit the mill and to benefit the farmers

and other locals who surrounded Canton. This collection is great for introducing the early history of the Champion Fibre Company and the production of the mill.

“The Log.” Canton Historical Museum. Canton, North Carolina. Vol. 7- Vol. 51. 1921- 1968.

The entire collection of the Mill’s newspaper, “The Log,” can also be found the Canton Historical Museum. They are organized in hardcover books ranging from 1921 to the late 1960’s. These offer a great deal of information on what was occurring within the mill, through analyzing how the texts are written it is apparent that the author did not intend to write negative things about the mill. Negative topics were only mentioned in these readings after they had been resolved. “The Log” seems like a biased writing from within the mill made to inform the workers of necessary news, but to also enhance the reputation of the mill and working for the mill. I find it intriguing that there are no issues of “The Log” leading up to the strike and shortly after the strike had ended; the writer may have been ordered not to write, or chose so by his own will, it is possible that the mill just simply could not fund the production of “The Log,” as tension grew and outside business declined.

----- “Champions New Service Emblems.” *The Log*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3. Canton, North Carolina. March, 1950.

----- “Do You Keep A Family Budget?” *The Log*. Vol. XXXVIII, No. 5. Canton, North Carolina. May, 1955.

----. “Good Neighbors at Canton.” *The Log*. Vol XLIII. Vol. XXXI, No. 5. May, 1950.

----- “Letters from Champion Men in the Armed Service.” *The Log*. Vol. XXVI, No. 12. Canton, North Carolina. January 1945.

----- “Memorial Edition.” *The Log*. Vol XLIII, No. 4. Canton, North Carolina. April, 1960.

----- “Old Timer’s Letter Reflects The Lasting Spirit of Canton.” *The Log*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1. Canton, North Carolina. January, 1950.

----- “Since War, \$60 Million to \$129 Million.” *The Log*. Vol XXXVII, No. 8. Canton, North Carolina. August, 1954.

-----."Social Feast for Firemen." *The Log*. Vol XXXVII, No. 5. Canton, North Carolina. May, 1954.

-----."Retiring Old Timer." *The Log*. Vol XXXVII, No. 6. Canton, North Carolina. June, 1954.

-----. "The Men Behind the Plant." *The Log*. Vol. III, No. 2. Canton, North Carolina. July, 1924.

-----. "Target Shooting at Camp Hope." *The Log*. Vol XXXIV, No. 1. Canton, North Carolina. January, 1951.

Waynesville Mountaineer. Periodical. Waynesville, North Carolina: February, 1960.

Much like the Asheville Citizen Times, the Waynesville Mountaineer has been around for a large portion of the mill's history. Often the Mountaineer covers the same topics of the Citizen Times, but it allows for a different perspective on the same news, particularly given how close Waynesville is to the Canton paper mill. Waynesville later adopted a branch of the Champion Fibre and Paper Company, so there is potential for a possible bias.

-----. "Champion Ready to Buy Waynesville Plant: Expansion to Start March." *Waynesville Mountaineer*. Vol. 75, No. 20. February 22, 1960.

-----. "Sawmills Converting Waste Slabs Into Profitable Chips for Paper Under New Plan at Champion." *Waynesville Mountaineer*. Vol. 75, No. 13. February 15, 1960.

Robertson, Reuben B. Collection, 1890-1973. M77.13.1-14. Special Collections, D.H. Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville. Asheville, North Carolina.

This collection can be found at UNCA library's Special Collections. Inside the collection are personal accounts, speeches, and memoirs by Reuben Robertson Sr. ranging from the early history of the Canton mill and into the 1980s. This collection shows Robertson's personal life, as well as his business life, it also gives insight into his personality and to what effect that had on the running of Canton's mill.

Roudebush, Allen. ed. *Memoirs of Reuben Robertson Sr.* Vol. 2. Hamilton, Ohio, 1990.

The memoirs of Reuben Robertson Sr. can be found at the Canton Historical Museum, and detail Robertson's feelings and his account of the mill's history showcasing his pride in the company, his regrets along the mill's history, and many anecdotes from his life.

Secondary Sources

Bartlett, Richard A. *Troubled Waters: Champion International and the Pigeon River*

Controversy. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 1995.

This book briefly talks about the history of the Canton paper mill, but focuses on the mill's effect on the ecosystem of Canton, and those downstream of Canton running into Tennessee. This book also takes note of worker's conditions, how these chemicals being released downstream are not only affecting ecosystems, but what about the men and women who work with these chemicals? This book was published in 1995 and was focused on more recent conditions, but it notes that the conditions workers of the mill worked in 1995 were leaps and bounds more improved than the conditions of the past decades. The same goes for the effect of neighboring ecosystems, as eco-friendly laws became more relevant in the later part of the twentieth century.

Clark, Daniel J. *Like Night & Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town.* University of Chapel Hill Press, 1997.

This book portrays select mill towns in North Carolina after World War II and explains how technological advances and drastic changes in the political environment brought upon unionization and changed the mill and town environments.

Hall, Jacquelyn D., James L. Leloudis, Robert R. Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones,

Christopher B. Daly, and Micheal Frisch. *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern*

Cotton Mill World. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World brings together numerous oral histories to portray mill towns and industry in the South. It explains how industry was able to smoothly infiltrate the Southern lifestyle and the relationships between industries and communities.

Kleinig, John. *Paternalism*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1983.

This book explains the psychology of the paternalistic strategy, and while it covers many different aspects of the use of paternalism it gives excellent insight into how paternalism was a successful strategy for mill owners. Kleinig demonstrates the strengths of the paternalistic strategy, as well as the weaknesses.

Lanning, Elaine K. "Robertson, Reuben Buck." NCPedia. last modified 1994. accessed on November, 22, 2014. <http://ncpedia.org/biography/robertson-reuben-buck>.

Lanning wrote a brief article for NCPedia.org that pointed out some of the highlights of Reuben Robertson Sr.'s life. She acknowledged his many successes and his titles that were given through his humanitarian lifestyle, even deeming him a "quiet philanthropist."

Lucas, Rex A. *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown; Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Though Lucas is focused on Canadian towns in his book, he does explore the same situation that the residents of Canton faced. I can use this secondary source to compare the mill towns of Canada with the Canton mill town. Most of the workers of the Champion Fibre Company lived in close proximity of the paper mill from the birth of the company and even today. This is the same for many other mill towns, as noted in Lucas' book, I plan to argue that being in such a community-based workspace only further developed unionization ideas because that community aims to aid one another to keep the community strong, over keeping the production of a plant strong.

Miller, Jason. "Labor Relations and Champion Fibre Company" Senior Thesis. University of North Carolina at Asheville. 2001. D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections.

Jason Miller's senior thesis looked at the paper mill in Canton, however this thesis was focused entirely on the Strike of 1924 and the details that surrounded that event. His writing paints an early picture of Champion and its relationship with its employees.

Tullos, Allen. *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

An interesting read, Allen Tullos portrays some of North Carolina's mill towns and the relationships between rural piedmont communities and the industries that entered into them. Tullos analyzes the poverty of the Carolina piedmont and how that left communities vulnerable

to industrial invasion. He further evaluates how industries used the areas and communities that they had chosen to encompass themselves into to their advantage.

ZoomInfo. "From Kromekote to Benefit, 1946-1994." Last modified March 8, 2012. Accessed

Oct. 25, 2014. <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Reuben-Robertson/52612223>

This article looks at Reuben Robertson Jr.'s development and introduction of a revolutionary addition to the papermaking industry, Kromekote. The article indicates that his advent of Kromekote helped push him into the direction of the success he came to know. It explains what Kromekote is, and the implications it had for Robertson Jr.