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### Gardner-Webb University History Professor Debuts New Book on Cannon Mills

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# Gardner-Webb University History Professor Debuts New Book on Cannon Mills

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Office of University Communications

October 17, 2013

## *Dr. Timothy Vanderburg Explores Kannapolis' Cannon Mills in Latest Publication*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—The history and importance of cotton mills throughout the South during much of the 20th century is part of North Carolina's rich heritage. Gardner-Webb University professor of history Dr. Timothy Vanderburg explores the significance and the long-term effects of one of the giants of the early Southern industrial economy in his new book "Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town."

Vanderburg, who was raised in Concord, N.C., has studied aspects of the textile mill industry, specifically Cannon Mills, for decades. "I grew up in the shadow of the mill (right next to Kannapolis) and had two grandparents who worked there most of their adult life," he shared. "My father had worked there when I was younger, and I had a brother who worked there for a while. When I was in grad school, my master's thesis was on Cannon Mills' advertising from 1935 through 1950. My research later expanded to include the specific type of paternalism used by Cannon Mills, why it was different and so persistent."

According to online resources and Vanderburg's own research, Cannon Mills was once the largest manufacturer of household textiles in the United States, and utilized a strong form of paternalism (the policy or practice of treating or governing people in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them rights or responsibilities). "At its peak, Cannon employed around 24,000 people. In many ways, it exemplified the textile industry and paternalism in the postbellum South," he shared. "The particular brand of paternalism utilized at Cannon Mills was much stronger and more enduring than elsewhere and it remained intact long after much of the textile industry had already transitioned to a more modern management style."

Vanderburg himself nearly followed in the footsteps of other family members, but ultimately decided to attend college instead of working at the mill. He came to Gardner-Webb College in the late 1970s and emerged with a bachelor's degree in social sciences in 1981. Initially majoring in Spanish, he changed his major after finding inspiration during history and political science classes, ultimately leading him to a career in higher education and opening doors for publishable research.

"Gardner-Webb gave me a good background intellectually," Vanderburg reflected. "I attribute a lot of my success to Dr. (Tony) Eastman and Dr. (Barry) Hambright who piqued my curiosity in both political science and history. Without my time at Gardner-Webb as an

undergraduate, I'm sure this book would not have come about.”

Vanderburg earned a Master of Arts in History from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 1994 and graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in History in May 2001 from Mississippi State University. His doctoral dissertation was titled “Cannon Mills: A Case Study in Southern Industrialization.”

His book is available from the University of Tennessee Press as well as via amazon.com. “Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town” has been nominated for the internationally renowned Hagley Prize in Business History in 2014.

Listen here to the full interview with Dr. Tim Vanderburg:

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.*