

Bemis, an historical community and legacy worth preserving.

Giving Opportunities

HISTORY

In 1900, Judson Moss Bemis chose 300 acres south of Jackson, Tennessee, to build a 21,000-spindle cotton mill. Bemis Bro. Bag Company would produce cotton cloth for Bemis bags. To produce high quality cloth, Mr. Bemis needed **skilled** workers to move to the village and stay long-term to work in his mill. To accomplish this goal he embarked on a great socio-economic experiment to ensure worker satisfaction in both the workplace *and* the community, and in doing so, touched almost every aspect of the mill workers' lives. The experiment was a great success for over 70 years, creating a heritage of family, community, outstanding work ethic and service.

Albert Farwell Bemis, son of Judson Moss Bemis and a graduate of MIT, supervised the planning and construction of the village of Bemis. He included other MIT architects and engineers in this work, including Andrew Hepburn and Arthur Shurcliff, who later gained national fame as lead architects for the Colonial Williamsburg project. Due to the influence of these architects, Bemis houses contained several design features seen nowhere else in the South at that time.

Bemis Development

The "Company" built the first church and the first school in Bemis. They provided multiple amenities in the community for their workers including housing, a park, golf course, lighted ball field, swimming pool, YMCA, YWCA with a skating rink and the Bemis auditorium/theatre. Numerous landscaping and work crews kept Bemis looking like the model mill village that it was.

Mr. Bemis was successful in keeping employees satisfied in both the workplace and community. As a result, his company was able to produce a quality product. Skilled workers moved to Bemis and stayed to work in the mill. Many of their children and grandchildren also stayed, and Bemis became largely a multi-generational mill village.

Yesterday and Today

The great experiment in Bemis is perhaps one of the best historical examples of management and labor working hand-in-hand in a mutually beneficial relationship. Even now, some 20+ years after Bemis sold its interest in the mill, lifelong residents and employees continue to sing the praises of both the Company and the village.

For more information on Bemis, TN and the Bemis Historical Society visit:
www.bemishistory.org

The Bemis Mill Village Museum

Mission: To acquire, preserve and make accessible important historical documents and artifacts pertaining to the history of Bemis, Tennessee, a mill town forged in the cotton fields by world-renowned entrepreneurs, engineers and architects.

The major project of the Bemis Historical Society is the rehabilitation of the Bemis auditorium/theatre to house the future Bemis Mill Village Museum. Nationally-renowned architect Andrew Hepburn designed the auditorium, built in 1922, in the sophisticated and elegant Beaux Arts style.

Located in the Bemis Historic District, the auditorium was purchased by the Society in 1999. In August 2000, the auditorium was designated as an **American Treasure** by the White House Millennium Project and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Complete rehabilitation of the building, including landscaping and a parking lot, is scheduled for completion in September 2006. This work has been made possible through matching grants from the Tennessee Historical Commission, a Save America's Treasures matching grant from the National Park Service, and generous contributions, including in-kind donations. The Society is currently seeking funding of the museum's exhibits, remaining grant matching funds and gift shop.



Jackson's Newest Historic and Cultural Project

Museum Features

Over 45,000 visitors are projected to visit the museum annually. In addition to world-class exhibits, the museum will house a gift shop on the main floor and a 3,200 sq. foot research center on the second floor where the theatre balcony was once located. Permanent exhibits will weave the story of Bemis and its citizens. Exhibit themes will include technology and the Bemis mill, education/sports/cultural matters, the Bemis auditorium, the Bemis family, the significant role of religion in Bemis, and a war memorial honoring Bemis veterans from World War I through Vietnam and defining Bemis' role during wartimes, including the role of women in the mill.

Other exhibits will reflect milestones in Bemis' history and will honor local "heroes," including Dr. Kelly Smythe, the beloved village

doctor for over 50 years. A "Music in Bemis" exhibit will include artifacts from Bemis' own Carl Perkins and W.S. Holland. The centerpiece of the museum will be the Mill Town Model, approximately twelve feet in diameter, containing a scale model of part of the village.

Museum Goals

- To establish a research center for documentation of the history of the mill town of Bemis, Tennessee.
- To develop educational activities pertaining to life and working in a mill town.
- To provide access to exhibits relative to the history and culture of Bemis, Tennessee.

The Bemis Historical Society

The Bemis Historical Society was established in 1998 with the sole purpose of preserving the history of Bemis, Tennessee, a uniquely planned cotton mill village. Today the Society has over 300 members dedicated to its major project, the Bemis Mill Village Museum. Each year the Society hosts an annual Bemis Days event that is attended by approximately 1,000 people.

Society meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month at 7pm at the Bemis United Methodist Church. Cost of membership is \$25 annually for individuals or families.

For more information about the Society, contact one of the officers below.

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| Carolyn Davis, Chairman | 731-424-6926 |
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| Joel Jackson, Vice-Chairman | 731-424-0739 |
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Help honor and preserve the heritage of Bemis, Tennessee through one of the giving opportunities below.

Direct Contributions

Contributions in the form of cash, checks or *credit card donations are always welcomed. If desired, they can be made in honor or memory of a designated person. Honorariums and memorials are listed in the Society's newsletter and on the website.

Contributions of \$500 or more given during the capital campaign (starting April 28, 2005) will be listed on a permanent plaque in the museum when it opens.

Cotton Boll Remembrances

These honorariums and memorials are at the \$500 level of giving. The name of the donor and person being honored will be displayed on a sign at the museum and listed on the website. Once the museum is open, these names will be transferred to a permanent display created by Bemis artist Rosalee Gibbons.

Cotton Boll Remembrances can be paid in a single lump sum of \$500 or in ten consecutive contributions of \$50.

*Gifts of Assets

Gifts of Assets may provide donors with significant tax benefits. The Bemis Historical Society encourages gifts of stocks, bonds and real estate.

*Planned Gifts

Planned Gifts are a way to continue your support of the Society and its work long into the future through bequests, life insurance or trusts.

Named Gift Opportunities

Named Gift Opportunities are available, including the museum, exhibits, research center and others.

For information about named gift opportunities, call Fundraising Co-Chairs Anita Roark at 731-427-2609 or Warner Turner at 731-424-2784.

* For more information about credit card donations, gifts of assets or planned gifts, contact our development consultant, Frank McMeen, at 731-660-8770, or by e-mail at Frank.McMeen@wth.org.

The Bemis Historical Society is a 501(c)3 entity. Part or all of your contribution may be tax deductible.