



## The Saluda Factory Interpretive Center

Hidden away in the woods along the rapids of the Lower Saluda River is a significant but little known piece of Columbia's history.

In April 1999, Riverbanks Zoo & Garden opened the Saluda Factory Interpretive Center, a log cabin and outdoor classroom that is used to educate visitors about the old mill ruins and the history of the land around it. The center is perched just above the river, deep into the wooded walkway that winds down from the Botanical Garden. It features drawings and artifacts that have been found at the site, a lovely front porch on which to enjoy the woodlands and the rushing river and an outdoor classroom for classes and lectures.

In 1834, the General Assembly chartered the Saluda Manufacturing Co., and it was one of the first textile factories in the state. The original owners were a group of 12 men with Davis Ewart as president. Two undershot wheels, each 18 feet in diameter, powered the mill, and the 80 looms and thousands of spindles were driven by a series of shafts and belts. The workers were mostly slaves.

In 1839, financial demands forced the owners to sell the mill. It was sold again shortly after that, and then in 1855 was bought by Col. James G. Gibbes. He renamed it the Columbia Cotton Mill, upgraded the machinery and added a small woolen mill.

Gibbes later sold the factory to three North Carolina investors. In 1865 it was burned to the ground, along with much of the rest of the city of Columbia, by Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's Union troops. Sherman, in fact, launched his invasion of Columbia from the Saluda Mill site.

The factory was rebuilt after the war but was consumed by fire again in 1886 and never rebuilt. In 1898, the Columbia Water Power Co. bought the mill ruins and the land and then sold them to Columbia Railway, Gas & Electric Company (now SCE&G) in 1911. In 1970, SCE&G agreed to lease its riverfront property to the Riverbanks Park Commission for \$1 per year for 99 years, and four years later, Riverbanks Zoo opened its gates.

Zoo maintenance staff built the Interpretive Center, and Columbia's Southland Log Homes donated the log home kit.