

Sibley Mill



Sibley Mill is an old textile mill located in Augusta, GA and situated alongside the Augusta Canal. Sibley Mill occupies the old site of the Confederate Powder Works facility. The Confederate Powder Works was constructed in 1862 and supplied approximately 2,750,000 pounds of gunpowder to the Confederate Army. The Federal Government confiscated the land and sold it off. By 1872 the remaining buildings had been deemed useless and most were demolished. The tall chimney in front of Sibley Mill is the only structure remaining of the old Confederate Powder Works.

A local business group formed the Sibley Manufacturing Company. They procured the former Confederate Powder Works site and began construction in 1880. Construction was completed in 1882. Sibley Mill was one of the largest and most successful cotton mills in the region. By the 1990s much of the mill's production had shut down. The mill continued to manufacture denim

Sibley Mill

until 2006. Today the mill is owned by the Augusta Canal Authority. The mill is mostly abandoned now, save for one end of the facility that houses water-driven turbines which generate electricity. The electricity is sold to Georgia Power. Recently the mill has been leased to a data storage company who will be moving massive servers into the building. Cleanup and restoration will restore some of the mill for this purpose.

Some say Sibley Mill is haunted. An explosion of 18,000 pounds of gunpowder at the Confederate Powder Works in August, 1864 destroyed the granulating building and killed 8 men and a boy. Over the years other industrial tragedies at Sibley Mill claimed the lives of workers. Sibley Mill was also the site of a brutal murder. The story goes that in 1906 a woman by the name of Maude Williams was having an affair with a married man. She ended the affair and one day while working at her giant loom in one of the weaving rooms the man showed up and shot her in the back six times. It is rumored her ghost still roams the mill's buildings and more than one person has reported encountering Maude or other ghosts from the Confederate Powder Works and Sibley Mill.

Sibley Mill is not open for tours or visitors. There are toxins in the facility, such as asbestos and peeling lead paint, along with debris from years of disuse. However, from time-to-time groups such as the Augusta Photo Festival (APF) have been able to get permission to visit. On Saturday, April 30, 2016, the APF led a group of photographers through designated areas of the facility. Dora and I were fortunate to join that group and along with friends and fellow photographers Amy Little, Carrie Chiu, and Steve Smith accompanied the Augusta Photo Festival on a photographic adventure. Due to the site once again being occupied this may have been the last opportunity to photograph inside the mill.

Members of the Augusta Photo Festival were open and friendly, making us feel welcome and part of the group right from the start. Our first contact with the Augusta Photo Festival was Mary Heath Bordeaux. Mary is the secretary of the Augusta Photo Festival and she took care of the details to make sure we were signed up, knew where we were going, and provided water and snacks at the venue. When we arrived at orientation we met Rebecca Rogers, president of the Augusta Photo Festival. Rebecca made sure everyone understood the hazards in the mill and provided helpful tips on what to expect. Ed Belinski provided a presentation covering everything from equipment to technique while photographing inside the mill. Everyone associated with the Augusta Photo Festival made us feel welcome and at home.

Once at the mill the Augusta Photo Festival divided us up into several smaller groups. Each group would visit a different area of the mill and rotate throughout the morning. This would allow us ample time in each area and room to shoot without getting in each other's way. Our guide was Casey Szocinski. Casey was an awesome guide as well as an amazing photographer. He made sure we had time and space to get our photographs. We were given the afternoon to move about the mill and revisit any

Sibley Mill

of the areas we wanted to spend more time in. We were able to spend about four hours in the mill.

While we didn't encounter any ghosts we did capture some amazing images. We would not have had this opportunity if it wasn't for the Augusta Photo Festival. If you are a photographer and either live near Augusta or plan on visiting you might want to check up on the Augusta Photo Festival.

The Augusta Photo Festival webpage is: <http://www.augustaphotofestival.org>

The images captured at Sibley Mill were all captured with a single image. That is to say I did not employ the HDR techniques of multiple/bracketed exposures. Many of today's modern cameras are capable of capturing a broad range of light. Checking the histogram before finishing up at a location ensured I hadn't blown out highlights or clipped the shadows. I used a Nikon D810 with either a 14-24mm f/2.8 or a 24-70mm f/2.8. I started out with the 14-24mm but found I was shooting at 24mm most of the time. I switched to the 24-70mm for the remainder of the day. All images were shot at ISO 100 and f/11. Interior exposures ranged from 6 seconds to 30 seconds. I shot from a stable tripod with mirror lockup to reduce vibration. Post processing consisted of a few basic Lightroom adjustments, such as highlights, shadows, exposure, vibrance, sharpening/masking, and lens correction. In some cases it was helpful to apply luminosity masking in Photoshop. I did not use noise reduction as I shot at ISO 100 and any noise I may have had simply added to the existing grunge.

{igallery id=8138|cid=173|pid=1|type=category|children=0|addlinks=0|tags=|limit=0}