

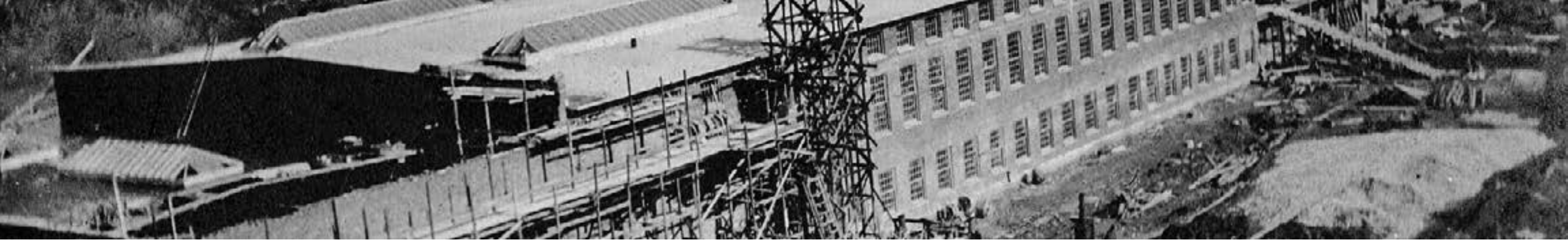
PAPER TOWN

A DOCUMENTARY FILM



Ford
Foundation
JustFilms

FOUNDATION FOR
THE CAROLINAS



T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

LOG LINE	2
SYNOPSIS	3
DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT	4
FINISHING FUNDS & FINISHING PLAN	5
CHARACTERS	6
THEMES	9
OUR TEAM	10
CONTACT INFO & LINKS	14

LOG LINE

When the paper mill that sustained a small Appalachian town for over a century shuts down, its people face not only economic collapse, but a deeper question—who are they without it?





S Y N O P S I S

On the evening of March 6, 2023, word spread quickly through Canton, North Carolina: the paper mill was closing. After 115 years, the town’s largest employer—and its beating heart—would shut down by early summer.

For generations, the mill shaped daily life in this small Appalachian town. It produced 1,800 tons of paper a day, supplying everything from Starbucks cups to orange juice cartons. But more than a workplace, it was a symbol—of identity, pride, and connection. The town and the mill grew up together, their stories tightly bound. Canton’s schools, businesses, and sports teams still bear the name “Papertown.”

The closure was a gut punch—not only to the town’s economy but to its sense of self. And the ripple effects stretch far beyond the mountains, threatening to upend the logging and paper supply chains across the Southeast.

This documentary moves with the community in real time, from the shock of the announcement to the mill’s final whistle. We witness the confusion and heartbreak as rumors spread, questions go unanswered, and the company—Pactiv Evergreen—remains silent. As details emerge of executives profiting from stock trades just days before the news, anger and betrayal deepen.

Some hold on to hope. Others brace for decline. But nearly everyone agrees: this feels like losing a member of the family.

Set against a backdrop of recent hardship—a devastating flood, the pandemic, economic strain—Canton’s story mirrors that of many American towns grappling with the collapse of industry. What happens when the engine of a community suddenly stops? And who do people become when their way of life disappears?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Over two years ago, a small crew of local filmmakers and I began documenting a seismic moment in the life of Canton, NC—when the beloved paper mill that shaped the town for nearly 120 years suddenly announced its closure.

As Ronnie Mill, local feed store owner and self-published author, told us, “You can’t have the mill without Canton or Canton without the mill. They’re one.” That line stuck with us.

We threw ourselves into this story—showing up day after day (unpaid), fueled by a shared belief that this chapter in Appalachian history mattered. With support from Foundation for the Carolinas, Catapult Film Fund, and the Ford Foundation, we put every dollar toward editing, slowly shaping a film from the deeply human moments we witnessed during those crucial months between announcement and closure.

Despite all the odds, our small crew kept moving ahead, and we are now close to a final cut., It’s been one of the most meaningful experiences of my career.

And now—this summer—the story we’ve been crafting for two years showed up on the front page of *The New York Times*. For a team that’s been working in relative obscurity, this is huge. It’s a beautiful moment of recognition, and we hope it’s a spark that helps us finish the film by this fall.

FROM THE NYTIMES ARTICLE...

- 60,000 manufacturing hubs have been wiped off America’s map since the late 1990’s.
- For every 100 factory jobs lost in a community, 744 other jobs disappear.



FINISHING FUNDS

As we enter the final stretch of production, we've been highly intentional with every dollar raised to date—maximizing our resources to bring *Papertown* to life. We intend to maintain this same level of care and efficiency as we raise the remaining funds needed to complete the film.

We are currently seeking an additional \$300,000 to finalize the project. These funds will support final editing, color grading, original score, sound mix and master, as well as insurance and PR costs for the film's release.

We have no outside investors or debt obligations, allowing us to move toward release with full creative and financial independence.

Your support through a 100% tax deductible donation will ensure that this story makes it out into the world. We are offering several tiers of support with accompanying credit:

\$250,000 – Presentation Credit (Single card with logo in opening credits and end credits)

\$125,000 – Executive Producer (Single card in the opening and end credits)

\$75,000 – Associate Producer (Shared card in end credits before crew, after producers)

\$50,000 – Major Funding Provided By (Single card in end credits after crew, option for logo)

\$25,000 – Donor (Shared card in end credits below major funding and above special thanks)

\$5,000 – Special Thanks (Shared card in end credits below donor)

*Papertown is fiscally sponsored by the International Documentary Association, making all donations 100% tax-deductible.



FINISHING PLAN

As of August 1, 2025, we've officially entered the finishing phase of the film, giving us a clear and focused path toward completion and festival launch.

Our top priority is submitting *Papertown* to the Sundance Film Festival by the September 23, 2025 deadline.

Over the next eight weeks, our goals are:

- Raising final finishing funds
- Preparing a festival-ready cut for submission. This does not have to be the finished version of the film but does have to be as far along as possible.
- Scheduling edit sessions with our post-production partners

If we are accepted into Sundance, we will use the momentum to ramp up the final stages of post-production and launch our PR campaign.

If *Papertown* is not selected for Sundance, we will submit to other top-tier festivals like SXSW, Berlinale, Tribeca, aiming for a 2026 premiere and distribution.



C H A R A C T E R S

MATTHEW BOYDSTON

Matt is a second-generation mill worker, following in his father's footsteps, and has worked there for 20+ years. He is a genuine and strong voice with a deep tie to the mill and this community. Matthew has a way of describing things with emotional power. Still, he often offers comic relief, leaving the viewer in stitches at his unique quips and effortless humor. We get an insider's view of the mill closure and the local way of life through Matthew, a mill worker in his 50s who is losing his job but is hellbent on continuing no matter what.

A character like Matthew helps defy expectations and dismantle stereotypes and ingrained ideas about life in rural America. At 6'5" and 300 pounds, with a thick accent and hunting dogs, people might quickly label Matthew as redneck, ignorant, hillbilly... But spending time with him, seeing his love for fly fishing and his Norwegian horses, being filled with laughter by his humor and wit, and the intelligence behind it all starts undoing our tendency to judge and label. He's the kind of guy that, on the surface, you think you have pegged and who seems to check all the boxes of a certain stereotype, but then you find out that he's so much more, and it changes your perspective. We think quite a few of our characters, and this film as a whole, will do the same.

GAIL MULL

Gail is our mother hen. She has the gift of gab and banter with anyone and everyone she encounters. She's hilarious. Gail is the front office coordinator for the labor union at the paper mill. Before that, she worked in the mill for 30 years while volunteering her free time at the union. She is deeply connected to the community and knows the ins and outs of church life, politics, and all things paper mill. We explore life with Gail as she teaches Sunday school, keeps the wheels turning at the union, and processes what it means to watch the institution she's dedicated her life to slip away.

ROGER FRADY

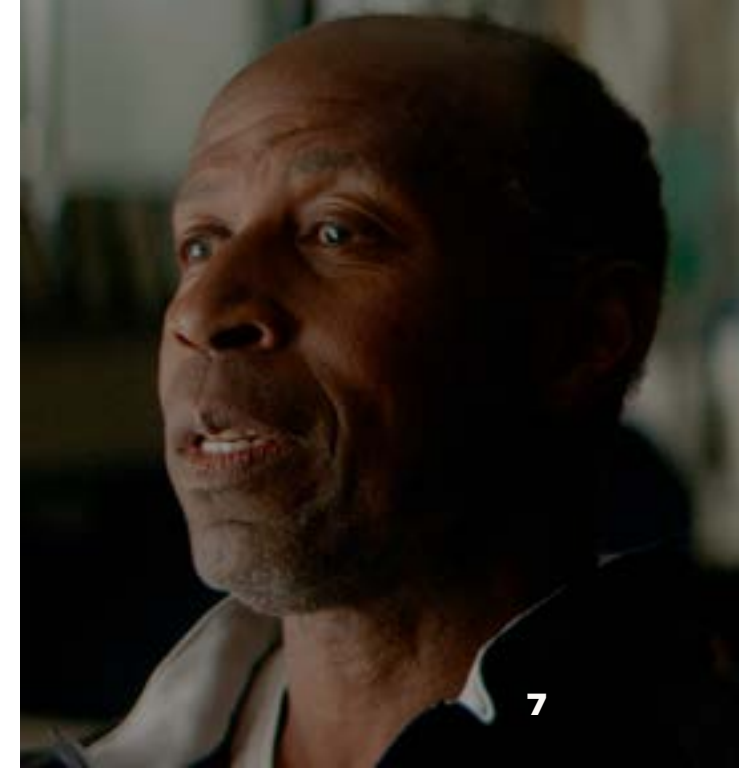
Roger has been at the mill for most of his adult life, and he was the last employee to walk out of the mill last fall. All of his other co-workers had their final day on June 8th, 2023, but as a seasoned operator in the steam vents, Roger was tasked with putting the mill to rest.

Roger is a phenomenal banjo player and a true Southern Appalachian soul. He is an avid trapper and hunter, as well as a deacon in his church, Mt. Zion. He thinks the closure might be an opportunity to finally live out his dream of buying a camper and venturing out west alongside his wife.

As a literary archetype, Roger is both our Everyman and our Sage. In the film he is an oracle of sorts, providing moments of profound reflection and philosophical insight into what is happening. He is a supporting character who will deepen the audience's understanding of the closure, and the impact that closure will have on the community's way of life. We hope to use the rich timber of his voice and lyrical reflections as a sort of poetic narrator within the film.

WENDELL GODFREY

Wendell is the "Pulp and Paper" teacher at the local high school, Pisgah High. Pisgah is one of the only high schools in the nation to offer their students a "Pulp and Paper" class. Wendell teaches with a mastery of the subject and a true passion for all things paper. He says, "Paper is in my blood," as he talks of his unfettered love for the process of making paper. Wendell conveys his knowledge as a chemical engineer to a classroom full of students aspiring to make paper and work in other industries, with many of his students aspiring to work in the mill after graduation. Wendell's unique perspective and relationship with Canton's paper mill provide another angle on what the closure means for the community and what the future will look like without the mill that no one ever imagined would be gone.





ZEB SMATHERS

As Mayor of a town that has experienced its share of trials in the last four years, Zeb gives us a glimpse into what challenges lie ahead in light of the paper mill closure. Zeb's deep love for Canton stems from his family's generational ties to the community. His grandfather owned the primary grocery market in town, and his dad was Mayor.

As a Democrat in a blue-collar Mill Town in the South, Zeb is surrounded by Republicans. Not everyone agrees with his politics, but humanity and neighborliness transcend politics in this small community when it matters most. We follow Zeb closely as he fights for the people, the mill workers, and the community, regardless of which party they align with.

Zeb sees the mill closure as a death in the family; it is his job to help the town grieve and rebuild. We move with Zeb among the townspeople as he navigates the pressures and hurdles of ensuring that his small town doesn't become a ghost town.

O T H E R C H A R A C T E R S

Many other characters add depth, breadth, diversity, and perspective to our story. To name a few... Kenneth Warren has been a Canton barber for over 50 years, and everyone tells him their stories and opinions, including Mayor Zeb and many mill workers. Jonathan Lovelace is a young father with two daughters and a wife who is a beautician in the neighboring town of Waynesville. Jonathan recently bought a piece of land to raise cattle and develop into a homestead, but with the mill's closure, he has to put those plans on hold. Ronnie Mills owns the local feed store and knows just about everyone in town. He's experiencing the closure as a small business owner and longtime resident of Canton. These and many other secondary characters, like the high school principal, the baseball coach, pastors, and small business owners, help to create a fully realized experience of the town and culture and offer the viewer a truly unique perspective of this small Appalachian community. of students aspiring to make paper and work in other industries, with many of his students aspiring to work in the mill after graduation. Wendell's unique perspective and relationship with Canton's paper mill provide another angle on what the closure means for the community and what the future will look like without the mill that no one ever imagined would be gone.



T H E M E S

LOSS OF INDUSTRY

The American industrial backbone has taken many hits over the years, affecting millions of industrial workers and local economies across the United States. This film examines the loss of industry for local communities and America as a whole. How do our communities change for better or worse? What happens to the unique culture that grows up alongside industry and shared generational experience?

LOSS OF IDENTITY

The town of Canton has been centered around the paper mill for nearly 115 years. The mill was the sole identity of the town. The coffee shop is called Papertown Coffee. The high school football team has “Milltown” emblazoned on their jerseys instead of the school’s name. Papertown memorabilia permeates the community. The people and local businesses have attached themselves to the mill, to its history. The identity of families, stretching back five generations, is inextricably linked to the mill. When all the workers walk out for the last time and the machines stop whirring and the last bits of steam evaporate, how does the town’s and people’s identity change? How do they cope with the loss? Is there a deeper identity that rises up from those ashes?

DEPOLARIZATION

Partisan politics are a grave dividing line that continues to create rifts within the United States of America, driving friends and family further apart. Yet, we have seen a community united around a common cause that brings people together beyond party lines to a place where each person is seen as a friend or neighbor experiencing the same loss. This theme is vital to healing the divide found in our country and showing that true unity can happen when we lay differences aside and see one another as neighbors first.

DISRUPTING STEREOTYPES

Our hope with this film is to defy expectations and disarm stereotypes and ingrained ideas about life in America, specifically small-town Appalachia. We aim to disrupt first-glance judgments and a false sense of knowing the other based on preconceived notions and stereotypical labels. Our goal is to achieve this fresh perspective and deeper understanding by spending time with our characters and showing them as whole people, not “players” in our film, whom we show only certain aspects of to fulfill a role or hit a story beat. We can achieve this because our connections are familial, personal, and real. This connection raises the stakes of our responsibility to tell their stories well or allow them to tell and live their stories as we do our best to capture them truthfully.





O U R T E A M

As residents of the area affected by the closing of the mill, our core production team is uniquely positioned to tell this story. Our lead producer, Chris Pruet, is a multi-generation resident whose “Papaw” worked at the paper mill like his father before him. His ties to the mayor, mill employees, and other key figures in the community have provided vital access and information. These relationships have allowed us to intimately capture the experiences of our characters as they navigate this transitional phase in their lives.



JEREMY SEIFERT - DIRECTOR

Jeremy is an award-winning film director, cinematographer, and editor whose documentaries have premiered at Sundance, Berlinale, Hot Docs, Tribeca, and AFI DOCS. He co-directed *The Devil We Know*, a 2018 Sundance documentary in competition and Netflix premiere. His short documentaries, *The Church Forests of Ethiopia* and *Ark of the Apocalypse* premiered with New York Times Op-Docs. His films *GMO OMG* and *DIVE! Living Off America's Waste* won over 30 awards at festivals around the world and both debuted on Netflix.



BENJAMIN JAMES ROBERTS - CO-DIRECTOR

Ben is a Director, Cinematographer and Composer. He is the creator of multiple docuseries, including *Divergence* and *Rooted*, as well as short-form commercial spots. He has received a collection of awards including Best Director at the Telly Awards. His commercial work includes brands such as IcyHot, Dick's Sporting Goods, Tennessee Tourism, QuickTrip, Georgia Power, Wild Turkey, and Grand Marnier. As a composer, Ben has scored a collection of feature-length documentaries, commercial spots, and the upcoming TV series Neon Babylon. In another life, Ben was a touring and studio musician for Grammy Award winning artist John Mark McMillan.



RYAN SUFFERN - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Ryan is a Grammy-winning and Emmy-nominated director and producer, who previously headed up the documentary division, which he co-founded, for The Kennedy/Marshall Company. Over the past decade, he has helped to produce over 30 documentaries, ranging in topics from music to sports to social causes, but always with an emphasis on the human interest at the heart of the story. As a director, Suffern helmed the award-winning *Finding Oscar*, which Steven Spielberg executive produced in association with USC Shoah Foundation. Suffern recently co-directed and produced with Frank Marshall *Jazz Fest: A New Orleans Story*, which won a Grammy for Best Music Film. Suffern directed a two-part documentary on the legendary A&M Records for EPIX, along with *A Final Cut For Orson: 40 Years in the Making* for Netflix, documenting the finishing of Orson Welles's *The Other Side of The Wind*. Suffern has produced numerous other documentary titles, including *The China Hustle*, *Satan & Adam*, *The Man vs. The Machine* and the Emmy-nominated docuseries *Laurel Canyon: A Place in Time*. He served as an Executive Producer on *The Gift: The Journey of Johnny Cash*, a YouTube Originals release, and HBO's *The Bee Gees: How Can You Mend a Broken Heart*, as well as the Paul McCartney / Rick Rubin docuseries for Hulu, *McCartney 3,2,1*.

CHRIS PRUETT - PRODUCER

Chris is a producer based in Asheville, NC who spends most of his time in the commercial space working with clients like the United Nations, the Republic of Georgia, Magnolia, UFC, the State of North Carolina and others. Chris' "people driven" approach to projects renders an honest and authentic product that captures the essence of what it means to be human. Chris is a fifth generation native of Canton. His grandfather worked in the mill and he brings his many local connections to this project.

COLBY SEXTON - PRODUCER

Colby is the owner of West Ashe Creative in Canton, NC and has worked in various film and television mediums for the past 22 years. Focused primarily on narrative-based commercial work, Colby enjoys crafting stories that engage viewers while creating connections that celebrate our human nature. Colby has branched out in the last 6 years to focus on directing and producing larger projects.

REBEKAH FERGUSSON - CONSULTING PRODUCER

Rebekah is an accomplished documentary producer whose recent credits include the Rory Kennedy-directed *ADRIFT* (Mill Valley 2023), the Academy Award-nominated Netflix Originals *CRIP CAMP* (Sundance 2020) and *END GAME* (Sundance 2018), and the Kevin Durant executive-produced *Q BALL* for Fox Sports (SFFilm 2019). She co-produced the Academy Award-shortlisted HBO documentary *THE CASE AGAINST 8* (Sundance 2013), directed *PELADA* (2010 SXSW), and was a cinematographer on *END GAME* and *PELADA*. Rebekah has been an Impact Partners Producing Fellow and a board member of the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA). Based in Durham, NC, she is a 2023-4 Visiting Filmmaker in the Documentary Film Program at Wake Forest University, and she is producing two films slated for release in 2024.

JACOB SUTTON - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Born and raised in western North Carolina, Jacob chose the path of filmmaking at an early age. Starting as a snowboarding videographer, he soon led a team filming a snowboarding documentary for a top-tier snowboard company throughout Japan. Since then, Jacob has honed his skills as a Director of Photography, servicing award-winning brands globally. He DP'd the New York Times Op-Doc, "*Ark of the Apocalypse*." He has received multiple Telly and Addy awards for his commercial work. Jacob owns Creative Campfire, a production company based in western North Carolina. He has worked extensively with Jeremy, Ben, Chris, and Colby, significantly adding to the team's synergy.







C O N T A C T I N F O & L I N K S

JEREMY SEIFERT

jeremy@newunionfilms.com

828-707-4324

Sizzle Reel & Scenes Visit

WWW.PAPERTOWNFILM.COM

PASSWORD: trgrfJNLKjls*@314