

## WROTON FAMILY OF ROCK HILL

By Paul Gettys

The Wroton family lived at 406 Oakland Avenue in Rock Hill for many years. This short paper provides some details about the family and their contributions to Rock Hill.

Charles Langdon Wroton was born April 29, 1865 at George's Creek, near Denmark in Bamberg County.<sup>1</sup> His parents were William Henry Wroton, a merchant in Denmark, and Hattie Jane Rice Wroton. The 1870 Census shows the family with four children: Henry, age 12, Hattie, age 7, Charles age 5, and Hubert (spelled Hobert in the Census), age 1. Charles must have received a good education in local schools, as he attended The Citadel and graduated in 1886.<sup>2</sup> His brother W. L. Wroton was also well-educated and became a Methodist minister, serving at a number of churches around South Carolina.<sup>3</sup> His brother Hubert evidently was living in the Rock Hill area as a young man. In April 1900, he was involved in a strike of Southern Railway employees. He was sent to Chester to take the place of a striking employee in the railroad's telegraph office. He was assailed by a crowd of strikers and was persuaded to join them. He disappeared and wound up in Charlotte.<sup>4</sup>

The year following his graduation from the Citadel, Charles married Alice Augustine Alston of Rock Hill. Her father and grandfather were distinguished educators. Gen. John Augustin Alston, Alice's grandfather, was born in Fairfield County in 1809 and was a graduate of South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina). He practiced law in Yorkville. He later became principal of the Ebenezer Academy from 1851 to 1856, principal of the new Rock Hill Academy, then principal of the Mount Zion Institute in Winnsboro. Alice's father was Capt. George Butler Pearson Alston (1836-1886). He was educated under his father, served in the Civil War, and became a noted educator in his own right. He served as principal of the Fort Mill Academy and the Rock Hill Academy for nine years. Alice's mother was Alice M. Davis from Charleston. The family had a home on Hampton Street in Rock Hill while Capt. Alston taught

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<sup>1</sup> George's Creek is located on a modern Atlas a few miles south of Denmark near the border of Bamberg and Barnwell counties. It is a tributary of the Salkehatchie River. The area was part of Barnwell County until Bamberg County was created in 1897.

<sup>2</sup> *The State*, October 5, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> *Sumter Watchman and Southern*, December 6, 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, April 28, 1900.

here, and they were active members of St. John's Methodist Church.<sup>5</sup> Alice was born about 1868. We have no information on her education, but given the family's history of producing educators, it is likely that she was well-read. We have no evidence that Alice had any siblings.

In early November 1887, the following announcement was listed in the *Yorkville Enquirer*: "Last Wednesday, Miss Alice A. Alston, only daughter of the late Capt. Butler P. Alston, was united in marriage at the residence of the bride's mother to Mr. Charles L. Wroton of Barnwell County. Rev. W. H. Wroton, a brother of the groom, officiated. They took the train Thursday for Graham's where they will make their future home."<sup>6</sup> The Town of Denmark was originally called Graham's Turnout. Alice's father died about a year before her marriage. He had suffered wounds in the Civil War and had suffered poor health for a number of years.

It is not certain how long the couple lived in Denmark. The Wroton family was very numerous there, and it is possible that Charles was a merchant like his father. The couple's second daughter, Constance, was born there in 1894. Some time before the turn of the century, the family moved to Rock Hill. It is known that they visited Rock Hill in 1891 and stayed with the J. M. Cherry family.<sup>7</sup> Alice's aunt, Ella A. Davis, had married James Milton Cherry.

By the mid-1890s, it appears that the family was living in Rock Hill. The earliest citation that has been found is 1895, when the firm of Reid & Wroton is listed as a dealer in vehicles and furniture. An advertisement for this firm describes the business as "various lines of furniture, buggies, and harnesses."<sup>8</sup> W. G. Reid is one principal in the firm, and it is assumed that the other is C. L. Wroton. Beginning in 1898, Charles Wroton is listed as a dealer for the Rock Hill Buggy Company.<sup>9</sup> The company, headed by John Gary Anderson, developed into one of the largest makers of buggies in the South. In addition to serving as an agent for Rock Hill Buggies, Wroton was in the business of manufacturing wagons. In November 1899, it was reported that the Rock Hill Roller Mills received a new delivery wagon manufactured by Mr. C. L. Wroton.<sup>10</sup> A major fire raged through a section of downtown Rock Hill on September 8, 1900. The area, between Main Street and Black Street near Hampton Street, contained a number of small businesses, including the Rock Hill Wagon Works. Wroton's building was completely destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Within a few days, he planned to rebuild on the same site. "Mr. C. L. Wroton will rebuild his shop on the old site. His building will be of corrugated iron and will be 20 feet by 30

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<sup>5</sup> Biographical information on the Alston family from *Along The Land's Ford Road: A History of the Ante-Bellum Village of Rock Hill, 1850-1860*, Volume II, page 70, by William Boyce White, Jr., published 2008 by Historic Rock Hill.

<sup>6</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, November 9, 1887.

<sup>7</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, July 29, 1891.

<sup>8</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, February 19, 1896.

<sup>9</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, March 19, 1898

<sup>10</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, November 16, 1899.

<sup>11</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, September 12, 1900.

feet.”<sup>12</sup> Whether this building was completed or not, Wroton planned to relocate and expand by the next year. “The Rock Hill Wagon Works is the latest improvement in Rock Hill. It will be for the manufacture of one-horse wagons. Mr. C. L. Wroton is president and manager and his brother Mr. H. M. Wroton vice-president and superintendent of agencies. A site in the Oakland section has been secured and the erection of the buildings will be commenced soon.”<sup>13</sup> The business was incorporated later that month with a capital stock of \$7,000 and both brothers as incorporators.<sup>14</sup> By October 1901, “C. L. Wroton is completing the Rock Hill Wagon Works and has ordered new machinery.”<sup>15</sup> The location of this facility has not been discovered.

At the same time he was involved in wagon manufacturing, C. L. Wroton was also investing in the furniture business. In December 1899, “C. S. May sold his stock of furniture to the Rock Hill Furniture Company, a corporation to be organized and of which Mr. C. L. Wroton is a leading stockholder.”<sup>16</sup> There are newspaper ads for several months for the Rock Hill Furniture Company with C. L. Wroton as General Manager.<sup>17</sup> Only six months later, Wroton exited this business. In June, 1900, “E. L. Barnes and S. T. Love have purchased the stock of the Rock Hill Furniture Company and will run it as Barnes & Love. C. L. Wroton and H. M. Wroton are retiring from the business, and H. M. Wroton will return to his home in Denmark.”<sup>18</sup>

Charles was active in various civic duties. He served on a York County petit jury in April 1900<sup>19</sup> and was elected an officer in a Rock Hill Masonic order later that year.<sup>20</sup>

During this time of various business and civic activities, the Wroton family built an impressive home on Oakland Avenue, then the most fashionable address in Rock Hill. Designed by Rock Hill architect Hugh Edward White, the house at 406 Oakland Avenue was a large Queen Anne style home. In February 1899, C. L. Wroton was having a well drilled on his vacant lot on Oakland Avenue.<sup>21</sup> The house was under construction in July, and the cost was estimated at \$3,500, one of the most expensive of the houses then under construction in Rock Hill.<sup>22</sup> The house was nearing completion when an incident occurred. “Little Anna Kate Fewell, while at the newly constructed dwelling of C. L. Wroton last Friday, fell from the second floor to the

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<sup>12</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, September 15, 1900.

<sup>13</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, May 1, 1901.

<sup>14</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, May 29, 1901.

<sup>15</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, October 26, 1901.

<sup>16</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, December 9, 1899.

<sup>17</sup> *Fort Mill Times*, March 21, 1900 and several other dates.

<sup>18</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, June 27, 1900.

<sup>19</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, April 18, 1900.

<sup>20</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, December 15, 1900.

<sup>21</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, February 25, 1899.

<sup>22</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, July 15, 1899.

first. Her injuries were not serious.”<sup>23</sup> The Wroton family moved into their new home by mid-November 1899.<sup>24</sup> They would live at 406 Oakland Avenue for many years, although there are times when they possibly lived elsewhere for short periods.

Charles L. and Alice Wroton had three children. Alice Alston Wroton was born in 1889, Constance Langdon Wroton in 1894, and Butler Alston Wroton in 1897. It appears that Alice and Constance were born in Denmark before the family moved to Rock Hill.<sup>25</sup> The family was settled in their new home when the 1900 Census was recorded. The household included C. L. Wroton, age 35, described as a furniture dealer, Alice A. Wroton, age 33, daughter Alice A. Wroton age 11 and “at school,” Constance Wroton, age 6, Butler Alston Wroton, age 2, and Alice Alston, age 53, who was Alice Wroton’s mother. There were three females named Alice in the home. The daughter Alice was often called Alston, her middle name.

The family also rented rooms, like many other families in that period. In 1901, a Miss Slighter was boarding with the family.<sup>26</sup> In 1904, “Mr. and Mrs. S. E. Mathis of Camden have rooms at Mr. L. (sic) L. Wroton’s house. Mr. Mathis is in charge of the Rock Hill Brick Works.”<sup>27</sup>

It appears that Charles Wroton’s wagon business failed at some point. He continued to be a sales agent for buggy companies, but also began to teach. In July 1901, he was attending summer school at Winthrop College as a teacher.<sup>28</sup> In 1905, it was reported that “C. L. Wroton has moved his family to Red Springs, where he is teaching in the graded school.”<sup>29</sup> It is not clear where this was. There is a Red Springs in Robeson County, North Carolina which had a military school for boys between 1896 and 1915. This teaching position did not last long, as in 1907, he is listed as a salesman for the Yorkville Buggy Company.<sup>30</sup> The 1908 City Directory for Rock Hill shows the family at 406 Oakland Avenue and lists Charles as a traveling salesman. The 1910 Census lists Charles as a “commercial traveler,” and has the same household as the previous Census.

In May 1912, Alice Wroton died in the State Hospital in Columbia at the age of about 44. It is not known how long she had been a patient there, or what her mental or physical condition was. The funeral was held at the home on Oakland Avenue, conducted by Rev. E. K. Harden and Rev. Mr. McAlpine officiating. She was buried in Laurelwood Cemetery.<sup>31</sup> Her death brought a

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<sup>23</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, September 13, 1899.

<sup>24</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, November 16, 1899.

<sup>25</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, January 30, 1967.

<sup>26</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 6, 1901.

<sup>27</sup> *Rock Hill Record*, April 15, 1904.

<sup>28</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, July 8, 1903.

<sup>29</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 27, 1905.

<sup>30</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 25, 1907.

<sup>31</sup> *Rock Hill Record*, May 30, 1912.

period of instability to the story of the family. There are some discrepancies in the record. Charles Wroton's obituary, written when he died in 1942, states, "Mr. Wroton was first married to Miss Alice Augustine Alston in 1887. Following her death, he was married in 1911 to Josie Lee Carter of Helena, Georgia."<sup>32</sup> We know that Alice did not die until May of 1912. On June 30, 1912, a son, Charles Langdon Wroton, Jr., was born to Charles and his new wife, Josie Lee. On his Social Security application, the son identified Josie Lee as his mother, and states that he was born in Seneca, South Carolina. A second son, William C. Wroton, was born in Buena Vista, S. C. about 1914. In the 1913 City Directory for Rock Hill, Charles is not listed as a resident in the Oakland Avenue house. The daughters (Alice) Alston and Constance are the only residents. Alice was about 24, and was employed as a stenographer. Constance was about 19. Butler, the son by the first marriage, was about 16 and is not listed. He could have been living with Charles and his new wife or could have been away at school.

The second marriage evidently did not last long. The obituary for Charles Jr., states that he lived with his mother from age two in Macon, Georgia.<sup>33</sup> This would indicate that around the time the second son was born, the second Mrs. Wroton moved home to live with her mother. In the 1920 Census and the 1930 Census, the family is listed as headed by Emma Carter, and they lived at 860 New Street in Macon. Josie Lee Wroton, a stenographer and bookkeeper, is in the household, along with Charles Wroton and William Wroton, grandsons of the householder.

By 1920, the Census for Rock Hill shows that Charles, Sr. is again living at 406 Oakland Avenue. No occupation is listed in this record. Also in the household are daughters Alston and Constance and son Butler. The 1922 City Directory lists the same residents. Charles is described as a teacher. The four family members lived together in subsequent city directories and census reports. Charles, Sr. is consistently listed as a public school teacher until 1940, when there is no occupation listed. At this point, he was 74 years old. As far as can be determined, none of three children of Charles and Alice Wroton ever married or had children.

Charles L. Wroton died on January 5, 1942 at the home on Oakland Avenue from a heart attack. The funeral service was held at the home, officiated by Rev. J. F. Lupo, and burial was at Laurelwood Cemetery. The obituary listed as survivors daughters Alston and Constance and sons Butler and Charles, Jr. His youngest son, William, had died.<sup>34</sup>

There were five children of Charles L. Wroton, three through his first marriage with Alice Alston, and two by his second marriage with Josie Lee Carter. These are described briefly below:

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<sup>32</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, January 7, 1942.

<sup>33</sup> *Salem Statesman-Journal*, June 7, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, January 7, 1942.

**Alice Alston Wroton** (January 1, 1889 – February 2, 1973). Usually known as “Alston”, she was probably born in Denmark, S. C. but lived most of her life in Rock Hill at 406 Oakland Avenue. In 1908, she was one of 46 girls competing for the available scholarship from York County to Winthrop College.<sup>35</sup> In the 1913 City Directory, she is listed as a stenographer, a position which involved taking dictation in shorthand but also would have probably involved other secretarial duties. In the 1920 Directory, she was working for A. D. Gilchrist, an architect who designed a number of buildings in Rock Hill and surrounding areas. She continues to be described as a stenographer in subsequent directories and in the 1930 Census. She never married and died in 1973 at the age of almost 84.

**Constance Langdon Wroton** (July 16, 1894 – January 27, 1967). She was born in Denmark, but moved with the family as a young girl to Rock Hill. She lived at 406 Oakland Avenue from its construction in 1899. Like her sister, she worked as a stenographer. This profession is recorded beginning in the 1920 City Directory and through 1936. In the 1922 Directory, she was working for J. J. Starr, a Rock Hill architect. In 1943, at the age of 49, she applied for a delayed birth certificate in order to volunteer for service in the WAAC (Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps). It is not clear if she actually served. She died in January 1967 at the age of 73 at York General Hospital after a short illness. The funeral was held at Greene’s Funeral Home and was officiated by Dr. J. F. Lupo and Rev. Wannamaker Hardin.<sup>36</sup> Constance never married. When she died, her address was listed as 519 Union Avenue.

**Butler Alston Wroton** (December 15, 1897 – November 26, 1981). Butler was probably born in Rock Hill after the family moved here, and he lived in the family home most of his life. Butler suffered from some illness which evidently affected his ability to work. His draft registration card for World War I described his present occupation as “none – sick in hospital.” He is described as tall, slender, and with brown hair and brown eyes.<sup>37</sup> In early City Directories and Census reports, he is shown as living at home with no employment. In the 1930 Census, he is described as an electrician in a finishing mill. He died in 1981 at the age of 83. His death occurred in the Fairfield Hospital in Winnsboro and he is recorded as living in Ridgeway, S. C., possibly in a home or institution. There was a graveside service in Laurelwood Cemetery, conducted by Dr. J. L. Lupo.<sup>38</sup>

**Charles Langdon Wroton, Jr.** (January 30, 1912 – June 12, 2006). Charles, Jr., who often went by the name “Lang,” was the son of Charles L. Wroton, Sr. and his second wife Josie Lee

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<sup>35</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, July 3, 1908.

<sup>36</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, January 30, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> World War I draft registration card, September 12, 1918.

<sup>38</sup> *Rock Hill Herald*, November 29, 1981.

Carter. He was born in Seneca, and moved with his mother at the age of two to her mother's home in Macon, Georgia at 860 New Street. He went through the public schools in Macon, and was a four-star athlete in high school. He determined to get a good education, and made his way to Nashville to attend Vanderbilt University in 1933 in the depths of the Depression. He worked his way through and received a degree. In World War II, Lang served as a paratrooper in Holland and Germany with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. After the war, he stayed in Germany for several years and served as a lower court judge for the U. S. occupation forces in Berlin. While there, he met and fell in love with a German girl, Herta Klara Beerbaum. They married in 1951, when she came back to the U. S. with him and became a naturalized citizen. The couple settled in Nashville, where Lang worked as an attorney. The couple later moved to Chicago, then to Salem, Oregon, where Lang served as an administrative law judge. Lang died in Salem in 2006 at the age of 93.<sup>39</sup> We have no record of children born to Lang and Herta.

**William C. Wroton** (c. 1914 - July 15, 1931). The younger son of Charles and Josie Lee Wroton, William is listed as being born in Buena Vista, S. C. The location is not certain. About the time of his birth, his mother moved the family to Macon to live with her mother, and his father, Charles Wroton, returned to Rock Hill. William died of pneumonia at the age of 17 in Macon, and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Biographical information from *The Statesman-Journal*, Salem, Oregon, June 17, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Information from Death Certificate, July 15, 1931.