

# Textile Executive Bill Grier Left Mark On Rock Hill

By RON CHEPESIUK  
And LOUISE PETTUS

William H. Grier Sr., who played a major role in the history of the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co., served the company as textile executive for 39 years while also working hard for the betterment of the local community and Winthrop College.

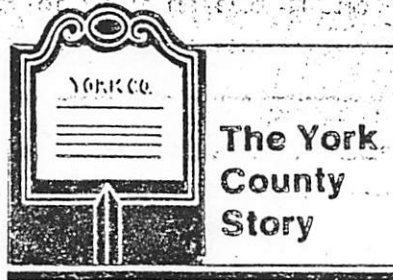
He was born in 1901 in Fort Mill. Grier's father was a grocer who sold everything from fatback to overalls.

Grier didn't have the money to go to college, but won a \$250-per-year scholarship to attend Clemson University, which he supplemented by earning 33 cents a day as a ROTC member. Grier graduated in 1923 with a degree in textile engineering.

Grier spent the next three years working in textile operations in Massachusetts, Georgia and Oklahoma before settling in Rock Hill in 1933 with his wife, the former Lila Atkinson of Spartanburg, whom he married in 1930.

The hard-working young executive worked his way up the company ladder to president of the finishing division of M. Lowenstein's and Sons Inc., the parent company of the Bleachery. Grier also served as executive vice president of Lowenstein. He retired in 1972, but remained a member of Lowenstein's board of directors.

Grier took an active interest in



Grier



Chepesiuk

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community affairs from the time he arrived in Rock Hill. He served such local organizations as the Boy Scouts, York General Hospital, YMCA and the American Red Cross.

For 22 years, from 1953 to 1975, Grier served as chairman of the Winthrop College Board of Trustees, providing leadership through a period of great change in which Winthrop made the transition from a women's college to a coeducational institution.

The campaign for coeducation began a year after Grier became a trustee. It was not until 1968, however, that a class-action suit led to the S.C. General Assembly approval of a one-year coeducation experiment. Winthrop finally became a fully coeducation institution in 1974.

Upon retiring from the Winthrop Board of Trustees in 1975, Grier said, "Winthrop has turned the corner; the college is over the hump and is going to have a good future. Now I feel it is time for a much younger person on the board. I think I've done all I can for Winthrop."

Grier is remembered as a spry, affable man who had a down-to-earth sense of humor and loved to smoke his pipe. When he learned about Winthrop's inten-

tion of giving him an honorary doctorate of law in 1979, he said, "My goodness gracious. I'm tickled to death about that." He became the seventh person and the first man in Winthrop's history to be awarded an honorary degree.

Bill Grier died in 1984 at the age of 83.

The year of his father's death, Bill Grier Jr. deposited several scrapbooks with the Winthrop Archives that impressively document his father's life as a textile executive, civic leader and Winthrop trustee.

The records contain personal and business correspondence, photographs and newspaper clippings relating to the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co. It also includes a framed citation in recognition of Grier's contributions to higher education in South Carolina.

The collection contains much interesting information on the growth of the Bleachery. One clipping for Dec. 18, 1954, reveals that a proposed addition to the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co. was to be named the Grier Division in honor of Bill Grier Sr.

A few pages later in the scrapbook, the reader runs across a copy of a speech by Grier in which he provides a negative answer to the question: "Is the textile industry expendable?"

Moving to the next scrapbook, we uncover a poster distributed by members of Local 710 TWU-ACIO, announcing that the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co. had agreed to a 5-cent-an-hour across the board wage increase effective April 18, 1955.

The collection should prove interesting to local historians, scholars and students in the years to come who want to know about our community's history.

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