

Textiles' Alexander Long Was Concerned Citizen

By LOUISE PETTUS

"The father of the night school system and the pioneer of welfare work among the cotton mill people," was the way The Charlotte Observer in 1929 described Alexander Long of Rock Hill.

In 1929, Long retired as the president of Aragon-Baldwin-Whitmire Mills but was still the chairman of the board of directors at the three mills. He also had been president of the Industrial Mills (Blue Buckle) in Rock Hill.



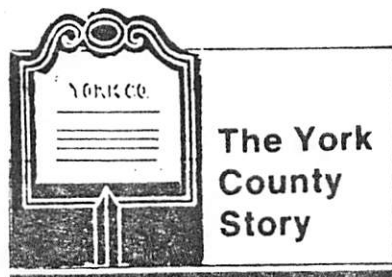
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Long was a strong proponent of literacy. The night school system or adult education was an attempt to attack the literacy problem in South Carolina. Long and his wife, Minerva Wilson, were active supporters of the statewide fight to reduce illiteracy.

Rock Hill was not the first town in South Carolina to become interested in adult education, but the night school system became a major success story because of the collaboration of Alexander and Minerva Long; R.C. Burts, the head of the Rock Hill school system; Mary Frayser, head of Winthrop College's home extension service; J.L. Carberry of Winthrop; and Wil Lou Gray, the S.C. Department of Education's field supervisor.

Alexander Long provided much of the financial support to pay for teachers (usually, school teachers would moonlight) and to furnish textbooks that were free to the adult students.

However, Long did much more than foot the bills for Rock Hill. He served as a leader of the statewide fight to get legislative aid for permanent state support of Gray's adult education program. Long



was appointed chairman of the South Carolina Literacy Commission.

About Long's efforts, Mary Frayser said, "You know Mr. Long starts anything, he sticks his teeth in as a bulldog and nothing can make him turn loose."

Long could have said the same about Mary Frayser. They made a great team.

Long allowed Winthrop faculty members and students under Frayser's direction to set up a model home in each mill village. Professor Carberry, who taught agriculture and did farm extension work for Winthrop, taught Aragon mill operatives "intensive gardening techniques." At the end of the gardening season, the home demonstration faculty taught the mill women how to preserve the garden produce.

Long's support of Rock Hill education did not stop with adult edu-

cation. He provided day care facilities for children of his workers and playground equipment for the parks.

When Rock Hill was struck by the flu epidemic of 1917, Long directed the setting up of soup kitchens, formed committees for daily house-to-house inspections, located linen chests and organized washerwomen to look after his mill villages. Nine hundred people contracted the flu, but only two died.

Besides being an industrial

leader, Long won the title of "Master Citizen" for his civic contributions. He deeded a building and land valued at \$20,000 to Rock Hill for building a public hospital.

Long was born in Greensboro, N.C., and educated in Concord, N.C. Orphaned at the age of five, he had to make his way in the world. His first job was as a store clerk for J.W. Cannon in Concord at the age of 14.

Nine years later, Long was a partner in a Spartanburg clothing

store. Long spent a year in the West on the advice of his physician and then returned to manage a cotton seed business. Next he was secretary of the Laurens, Watts and Darlington cotton mills. Long came to Rock Hill to build the Aragon mill.

It was a long, uphill fight to the presidency of a chain of cotton mills, but Alexander Long never lost the common touch.

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