

Cotton spurred growth in 1890s

■ Mills, start of Winthrop College paved Rock Hill's way to town status.

Towns often grow in spurts. Rock Hill's growth from village to town occurred in the 1890s, largely from the stimulus of cotton mill building and the successful bid for Winthrop College.



Nearby history

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street lighting. The only public transportation system was a mule-drawn streetcar that traveled from Main Street to just past the Winthrop College campus.

One of the reasons Rock Hill had won Winthrop College in 1895 was its proud boast that it had more paved streets than any other community in South Carolina.

(Columbia and Charleston soon passed Rock Hill's 10 miles of macadamized roadway.)

In a January 1906 letter to the editor of *The Record*, an irate citizen complained that Rock Hill was losing ground by not building a sewer system and installing paved sidewalks.

He added that he did think the present town council was superior to the council of a few years before, about which he "was informed that the entire time of one meeting of council was consumed in discussing whether or not a hitching post should be 2 feet or 2 feet and 6 inches high!"

The *Records* editor wrote that Rock Hill's major need was a trolley system that would connect Rock Hill to Yorkville, Fort Mill, Ogden, Smyrna and Edgemoor. (There was no mention of connection with Charlotte.)

The first action of city council in 1906 was to install concrete pavements from Main Street down Railroad Avenue (later Trade Street, now Dave Lyle Boulevard) to the train depot near the Oakland overhead bridge. Downtown had

had granite slabs serving as pavements since 1895, and a few residential areas, notably Woodland Park (now Marion and Saluda streets), had had paved sidewalks even longer.

The improvements must have inspired the council and private citizens. Within a year there was a power, light and water company laying 7 miles of mains, a reservoir, a standpipe holding 150,000 gallons of water and a 200,000 gallon artesian well. No longer would Winthrop College, which had its own deep well, have the only pure water in town.

Not all citizens supported the improvements. Backyard privies and individual wells suited some just fine. But there was one matter that kept everyone hot under the collar. They all agreed that Southern Railroad's passenger service was deplorable — "utterly inefficient and inconvenient."

Freight rates for goods originating in Southern states were much higher than on goods coming to the South from Northern states. On top of that, freight always took priority over passenger service.

There were a number of "swing trains," which had mixed passenger and freight cars. Rock Hillians complained that they never knew when the swing trains would arrive in Rock Hill or leave for Charlotte.

One day there were 25 passengers waiting to board for Charlotte. When the train arrived, it uncoupled and left for Chester with a party of tourists. The railroad replied that every train running between Chester and Charlotte stopped in Rock Hill.

There were five northbound and five southbound trains each day. However, the railroad official said that Rock Hill simply did not have enough business to justify anything other than mixed freight and passenger trains, and freight had priority.

Fifteen years later, the automobile had replaced the railroad as the number one passenger carrier and Rock Hill had embarked on one of the most ambitious road building campaigns in the state.

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