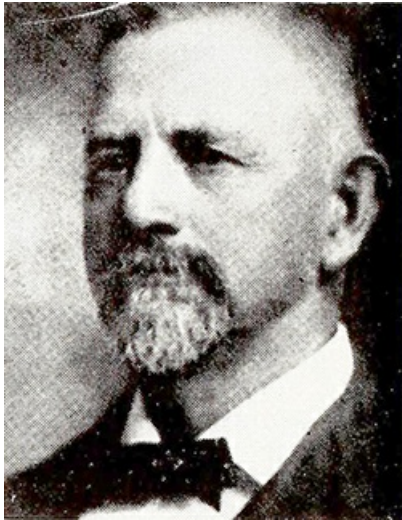


Chatham, Alexander ^[1]

Chatham, Alexander

by Garland R. Stafford, 1979

20 Jan. 1834–21 Jan. 1920



A photograph of Alexander Chatham published in 1952. Image from the Internet Archive.

Alexander Chatham, merchant, farmer, and industrialist, was born near Wilkesboro of English ancestry. His father, Martin Chatham, had come from Augusta County, Va., and located in [Wilkes County](#) ^[2] in 1828. A machinist and farmer, Martin Chatham operated a foundry and a repair shop in Wilkesboro. Alexander's mother was Mary Elizabeth Cass Chatham.

Chatham served an apprenticeship in his father's shop where, in line with natural interest and proficiency, he developed a high degree of skill in mechanics. At the age of twenty-five he moved to Elkin and secured a position with [Richard Gwyn](#) ^[3], who operated a mercantile business, a large farm, and a cotton mill known as the Elkin Manufacturing Company. Chatham had been there about three years when he married his employer's daughter, Mary Elizabeth Gwyn, on 28 Sept. 1862. He served as a lieutenant in the Confederate Army during the Civil War and after the war became a merchant and a farmer.

In 1878, Chatham and his brother-in-law, Thomas L. Gwyn, formed a partnership and built a small woolen mill, first known as Gwyn and Chatham, on Big Elkin Creek. This was the beginning of the [Chatham Manufacturing Company](#) ^[4], maker of world-famous Chatham blankets. In 1890, Gwyn sold his interest in the mill to Chatham's sons, and the name of the business was changed to Chatham Manufacturing Company.

Chatham operated a farm on the Yadkin River and organized and was first president of Elkin's first bank, the Elkin National Bank. His most vigorous years fell in the period of Reconstruction, and he became one of the founders of the New South. His enterprise gave the farmers of southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina a market for their wool, as well as providing labor for the local people.

Chatham was married twice. Of his marriage to Elizabeth Gwyn, three sons were born [Hugh Gwyn](#) ^[5] (b. 1864), Richard Martin, and Paul. Elizabeth Chatham died 23 Dec. 1875. On 12 Jan. 1878, Chatham married Alice Hickerson of Wilkes County. The children of this marriage were Myrtle Elizabeth, James Alexander, Raymond Hunt, and Thomas Daniel.

Chatham was a Methodist. His death occurred in Elkin, and he was buried there.

References:

Thomas Felix Hickerson, *Happy Valley* (1940).

North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, vol. 3 (1929).

Additional Resources:

Couch, S. Jason. *Elkin*. Arcadia Publishing. 2012. 109.

"Chatham, World's Largest Unit Woolen Mill, Blanket Leader." *The E.S.C. Quarterly*. (Summer-Fall 1952). 121-123.

<https://archive.org/stream/escquarterlyv912nort#page/n249/mode/2up/> [6]

Image Credits:

"Alexander Chatham, founder and long head of the large Chatham Manufacturing Co. at Elkin." Photograph. *The E.S.C. Quarterly*. (Summer-Fall 1952). 86. <https://archive.org/stream/escquarterlyv912nort#page/n215/mode/1up> [7] (accessed October 2, 2013).

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) [8]

[Business leaders](#) [9]

[Military personnel](#) [10]

[Textile industry](#) [11]

Authors:

[Stafford, Garland R.](#) [12]

Origin - location:

[Wilkes County](#) [13]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#). [14]

1 January 1979 | Stafford, Garland R.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/chatham-alexander>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/chatham-alexander> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/wilkes> [3] <http://www.downtownelkin.com/Pages/History.html> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/chatham-manufacturing-company> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/chatham-hugh-gwyn> [6] <https://archive.org/stream/escquarterlyv912nort#page/n249/mode/2up/> [7] <https://archive.org/stream/escquarterlyv912nort#page/n215/mode/1up> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/business-leaders> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/soldiers> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/textile-industry> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/stafford-garland-r> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountai-22> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>