

## **Gaddy, Charles Winfred** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Gaddy, Charles Winfred**

by David Winfred Gaddy, 1986

**25 Oct. 1880–4 May 1941**

Charles Winfred Gaddy, textile pioneer, churchman, and civic leader, was born in Anson County <sup>[2]</sup>, the second son in a family of eight. His father, George Washington Gaddy (1853–1912), was a tenant farmer who had lost his own father in Confederate <sup>[3]</sup> service in 1862. His mother, Sara Lou Cinda Morgan (1861–99), was descended from the Redfearn and Morgan families. His forebears were solidly English, and his great-great-grandfather, Thomas Gaddy (1753–1817), was a soldier in the American Revolution <sup>[4]</sup>.

At an early age, Fred Gaddy, as he was familiarly known, assumed much of the burden of supporting the large family. By the time he was nineteen, when his mother died, he had already experienced a variety of work throughout Anson County, cooking in a contractor's camp, digging wells and foundations, and clerking in a company store at Steele's Mills. During those formative years he acquired the characteristics by which he was known in later life: his strong, robust, six-foot-plus frame; his respect for hard, honest work and its rewards; his religious upbringing in a staunchly Baptist <sup>[5]</sup> household with high moral standards; and his thirst for learning, having been deprived of a formal education after the fourth grade. He helped to nurse his mother through a succession of illnesses, as measles led to pleurisy and then tuberculosis, which brought on her death at thirty-eight. He assumed the debt of her medical and burial expenses, which he finally paid off three years later, along with the balance on a farm account. His assumption of those obligations made a marked impression, both on creditors and neighbors, who saw the promise of a bright future from such a man.

After his mother's death, Gaddy went to the town of Albemarle, in neighboring Stanly County <sup>[6]</sup>, where he was hired as a sweeper in the Wiscasset Mills, working a fourteen-hour day. Sensing a potential for knit goods in the growth of the textile industry, the young sweeper learned to knit on the few, rather primitive machines then available. That was the beginning of what came to be the knitting department of the Wiscasset Mills Company. Gaddy became a fixer, overseer, superintendent, and finally general manager, as the company, under his leadership and direction, became "one of the finest hosiery mills in the country." A trade journal, *The Southern Knitter*, pointed out in May 1941 that "He started the hosiery industry in Albemarle, and from a humble position climbed to the top. He was recognized as an authority in the industry, and his advice and counsel were sought continuously by other textile leaders. He was quick to anticipate changes in the industry, and as the styles changed from cotton hosiery to silk, he was in the forefront in bringing about changes in the knitting department of Wiscasset Mills Company. His mill was one of the first, if not the first, to install central station air conditioning in the knitting department, which was characteristic of his vision and progressiveness in manufacturing. Practically all the knitting machines in the mill are of recent manufacture and latest design. Mr. Gaddy was primarily a manufacturer, and no matter whether it was seamless or full fashioned goods, his product was always of such quality as to find favor with buyers."

Hailed as "dean of the knitting industry," Gaddy served a term as director of the Southern Hosiery Manufacturing Association and in 1934 was appointed a member of the Hosiery Code Committee under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's <sup>[7]</sup> National Recovery Administration, a national recognition of his standing in the industry. He was one of the first southerners to place an order for full-fashioned hosiery machinery, and he engaged in the manufacture of such stockings when the process was almost unknown in the South. He was one of the first to operate a seamless hosiery mill, and his career spanned the change from cotton to silk, and with the advent of synthetics, to Dupont nylon.

Throughout his life he identified with the common man. His concern for his workers became legendary when the plight of the southern mill worker was a subject of national comment. An empathy born of his own experience led him to stress education and frugality. He preached these virtues through a company newspaper, *The Windemere Watchman*, which he edited as a newsletter and community organ for "his people"; he also ran a lending library for their benefit. The mill village was considered a model, and he encouraged the workers to save their earnings and buy their own homes. His employees gained him the reputation of running a firstclass training school for the industry. The mill itself, part of the Cannon chain, was kept spotlessly clean and bright to create a healthy work environment. Thus, in the labor union unrest that swept the Carolinas, his workers remained loyal to his management.

Lacking a formal education, Gaddy became a dedicated reader and through books educated himself. Poetry was a favorite form of literature, and a scrapbook shows not only his taste in its clippings but also examples of his own writing. Kipling, Dickens, O. Henry, Stoddard's lectures, encyclopedias, and other works made up his library. He was especially fond of books about Lincoln (in whom he may have seen a kindred spirit), and his collection of the writings of Mark Twain tells something of his own hearty (and sometimes mischievous) sense of humor; but his self-education embraced a wide range of technical and professional matter as well. Through his reading and through long practice he acquired a writing style with a wit, conciseness, and forcefulness that his contemporaries admired.

On 29 Apr. 1903, Gaddy married Mary Frances Bacon (1884–1966), a daughter of Joseph Daniel and Dora Ellen Lindley Bacon. Educated at Woman's College <sup>[8]</sup> in Greensboro <sup>[9]</sup> and a devout Christian who devoted much of her life to the work of the church missionary society, she complemented his personality with a gentle disposition and a talent for home management that matched his at the mill. Two sons, Joseph Winfred (1904–68) and Robert Herring (1905–55), followed their father into the textile business, and a daughter, Ellen Geraldine (b. 1913), married a textile executive.

Gaddy was a Baptist and a member of the board of deacons at the First Baptist Church in Albemarle, where he served as assistant superintendent of the Sunday school. He maintained a strong interest in the Baptist Children's Home in Thomasville and left a substantial bequest to that institution. A lifelong Democrat <sup>[10]</sup>, he served his community as a member of the board of aldermen and the library board. He fought for construction of a dam and the first city water works, and both the city hall and the county library used from the forties through the sixties were built during his tenure. He was a Mason, a member of the wildlife club, and a charter member of the local chapter of the Lions Club, the second in the state.

After an illness of several weeks, Gaddy died at his home in Albemarle.

#### References:

*Encyclopedia of American Biography* (1942).

Nathan Mobley, "A Man from the Ranks and His Method of Handling Labor," *Blue Ridge Magazine* 1 (April 1920).

*The Stanly News and Press* clippings and other materials (in possession of Mrs. Geraldine Gaddy Holbert, Albemarle).

#### Additional Resources:

Charles Gaddy, Buncombe County Wills. State Archives of North Carolina.

[http://www.ncdcr.gov/Portals/26/PDF/findingaids/containerlists/Buncombe\\_wills/BuncombeCo\\_wills\\_G.pdf](http://www.ncdcr.gov/Portals/26/PDF/findingaids/containerlists/Buncombe_wills/BuncombeCo_wills_G.pdf) <sup>[11]</sup> (accessed November 1, 2013).

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[Textile industry](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

#### Authors:

[Gaddy, David Winfred](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

#### Origin - location:

[Anson County](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

[Stanly County](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

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