

Reynolds, Alonzo Carlton ^[1]

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Alonzo Carlton Reynolds, educator, was born in the Sandy Mush community of Buncombe County ^[2], the son of John Haskew and Sarah Ann Ferguson Reynolds. After attending local schools and Weaver College ^[3], he began teaching at age eighteen. In 1895 he was graduated from George Peabody College, in Nashville, Tenn., where he met his future wife, Nannie Elizabeth Woods. Between graduation and 1912 he served successively as principal of Camp Academy in Leicester, president of Rutherford College ^[4] while at the same time serving as superintendent of Burke County ^[5] schools, and superintendent of Buncombe County schools (1905–12).

In 1912 Reynolds became the second president of Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School (now Western Carolina University ^[6]). There were shortages and difficulties for the school during World War I ^[7], but he succeeded in keeping a capable faculty and stressing the preparation of teachers for the rural areas of western North Carolina. With the physical and financial aid of students, faculty, and community and using a team of ponies and a wagon, he saw the construction of a new building for the school. While at Cullowhee he served as president of the North Carolina Education Association.

Reynolds taught at Woodfin High School in 1919–20. In the latter year he became superintendent of the Haywood County ^[8] schools but returned to Woodfin in 1924 as principal. He again served as superintendent of Buncombe County schools in the period 1926–33, when he promoted the consolidation of schools and saw the erection of new and better buildings. He advocated new methods of teaching, higher teaching standards, and expansion of the curriculum. He also was one of the first superintendents in the state to begin classes for children developmental disabilities. In 1930, as president of the Buncombe County Historical Society, he encouraged the publication of the *History of Buncombe County* by F. A. Sondley.

Seeing the need for a local junior college, Reynolds led the movement that resulted in the establishment of the Buncombe County Junior College in 1927. It was the first public junior college in the United States to offer free tuition. In time this school evolved into the Biltmore Junior College, which became the nucleus of the University of North Carolina at Asheville ^[9]. After leaving Biltmore Junior College in 1936, he was principal of Barnardsville High School for one year and of Oakley High School for five years prior to his retirement in 1942. He had invested fifty-three years as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and college president. A men's dormitory at Western Carolina University and a high school in Buncombe County were named for him.

Reynolds was a naturalist as well as a teacher. He knew all of the native trees, wildflowers, and birds—including the bird calls. Each summer while at Cullowhee he took his family and the summer school students on a week's camping trip to Whiteside Mountain, transporting the children and the provisions in two covered wagons. Nature study was required in the summer for prospective teachers. Fishing for mountain trout was a favored pastime, and he often took visiting school officials on trips to choice streams. He believed that physical fitness was an important part of the development of the whole person.

An active churchman, Reynolds often served on his church's administrative board and he taught Sunday school. He and his wife were the parents of nine children: Mary Woods, Sallie E., A. C., Jr., Margaret Cornelia, Alphonso Curry, Evelyn, Ruth, Elizabeth, and Thomas Davies.

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