

Wright, Charles Calvin ^[1]

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by Lois S. Self, 1996

14 Aug. 1862–14 July 1933

Charles Calvin Wright, educator, school administrator, and religious and civic leader, was born on a small farm at Hunting Creek in [Wilkes County](#) ^[2] and lived there all of his life. His great-grandfather, Thomas Wright, emigrated from England in the early eighteenth century and settled in [Surry County](#) ^[3], which he later represented in both the lower house and senate of North Carolina. Wright was also a lineal descendant of [Benjamin Cleveland](#) ^[4], a [Revolutionary war](#) ^[5] general who distinguished himself in the Battle of Kings Mountain. His grandfather, William W. Wright, moved to Hunting Creek in Wilkes County and served as a tax collector and justice of the peace until resettling in Alabama, where Wright's father, James W., was born on 28 February 1826. In 1836 the family returned to North Carolina, and James Wright became a rural schoolteacher in Wilkes County. He later married Frances (Fannie) A. Transou, a descendant on her father's side of French [Huguenots](#) ^[6] who had moved to Germany to escape religious persecution and there joined a group of [Moravians](#) ^[7] who migrated to Pennsylvania. About 1760 the Transous moved to Bethania, N.C., and settled in the area around Salem.

In 1862 Wright's father joined Company C of the Twenty-sixth North Carolina Regiment of the Confederate army. He was wounded in Pickett's Charge on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg; later he was captured and imprisoned at Point Lookout, Md., where he died in January 1865. At the time of his father's death, Wright, an only child, was unhealthy and less than three years old. His mother, who lived until 18 May 1907, cared for him and taught him to read. His only formal education came from the county's private schools, but he read voraciously in his youth and gradually acquired a considerable personal library. In later life he asserted that work on the family farm, which was "good for both body and mind," and the reading of "the lives of those who through adverse circumstances had won for themselves a name" had inspired him and shaped his character.

At seventeen Wright began his long teaching career in the public schools of [Wilkes County](#) ^[2]. Before age twenty-one he was appointed postmaster of Hunting Creek but resigned because of his youth. At twenty-one he was elected justice of the peace, an office he held for ten years. After sixteen years as a teacher he was elected county school superintendent. He also served as president of the Wilkes County Teachers Association and of the West Central District Association of County Superintendents, and he was a member of the County Board of Education, [State Board of School Examiners](#) ^[8], State Text Book Commission, Library Commission, and executive committee of the [State Teachers Association](#) ^[9].

It was in his role as a county school administrator, however, that Wright made his greatest contribution to his community and to the emerging professional status of public school educators. In 1900 the Wilkes school system consisted of a few log and unpainted frame buildings, as well as an insufficient number of inadequately trained and paid teachers; it had no libraries. During his thirty-four-year tenure the county made great strides in public education due to Wright's tireless efforts to obtain better facilities, improved teaching methods, more qualified teachers, and adequate textbooks and libraries. He served as Wilkes County school superintendent until one month before his death.

Wright, who supplemented his income as a teacher through farming, was active in several farmers' organizations. During the late 1880s and early 1890s he was one of the relatively small number of lecturers and organizers who rapidly built the [Farmers Alliance](#) ^[10] into a powerful force in North Carolina politics and economics. He was the first corresponding secretary of the Hunting Creek Farmers Sub-alliance, then president of the Sub-alliance, president of the Wilkes County Farmers Alliance, and steward of the North Carolina Farmers State Alliance. In 1891 he traveled throughout western North Carolina as assistant district lecturer for the Alliance, recruiting members and promoting its program.

In 1890 he ran for the state senate on the Democratic ticket with Alliance support but lost in his heavily [Republican](#) ^[11] county. Unlike many Alliamcemen he did not join the [People's party](#) ^[12], and in 1896 he again ran as a [Democrat](#) ^[13] for the senate and was unsuccessful. After the demise of the Alliance Wright joined the [Farmers Union](#) ^[14] and held local and national offices in that organization. In 1915, as chairman of the union's National Education Committee, he helped organize a campaign to encourage greater consumption of cotton products. During this period he also was a member of the State Board of Agriculture.

At the Edgewood Baptist Church Wright was a deacon for over twenty years and superintendent of the Sunday school until his son took over the post in 1933. In 1913 he helped found the Mountain View Institute, a private school later supported by the Baptists. Beginning in 1905 and continuing for over twenty years, he served as moderator of the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association, and after 1917 he sat on the board of trustees of the [Baptist orphanage at Thomasville](#) ^[15].

On 23 September 1891 Wright married Jennie Katharine Land, the daughter of Colonel J. C. Land. She also taught in the Wilkes County public schools and assisted in the work of the county superintendent's office. The Wrights had five children. The oldest, Mary Dorris, died on 10 April 1913 just after completing high school. The remaining four children were James

C., David R., Robert C., and Charles Calvin, Jr. Wright was buried in the Edgewood Baptist Church cemetery in Wilkes County.

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