

IT BEGAN AS LONG'S WOOD

Company Gave Once-Thriving Mill Town Its Name

BY SUSAN USHER

William Asbury "Jinx" Long was an ambitious young man.

Reared in the Seaside/Calabash area, he apprenticed in the Brooks store at Seaside. Then, in 1906, he struck out on his own, opening a general store on Butler's Pea Landing Road (which N.C. 904 has replaced) at what is now the intersection of N.C. 904 and Russtown Road, near Butler's Pond.

Not long after, a traveling photographer stopped by the store on his way to deliver prints to a prominent local family.

"Jinx" Long saw a picture of Bessie Lee Butler and announced, "That's the woman I'm going to marry."

Whether he was joshing or deadly serious, captivated by her looks or by the fact that she owned considerable property and came from a prominent family, no one will ever know. The following year "Jinx" did just as he had vowed; he married Bessie at the home of her mother and stepfather, Mary Melvina Cox Butler McKeithan and Isiah McKeithan.

They lived with the McKeithans until their own home was finished not far from the store. Then Jinx's parents, John Melvin and Francis Jane "Fanny" Gore Long, came to share their home until their deaths in the early 1920s.

What Jinx couldn't have known then was that his and Bessie Butler's marriage led indirectly to the name "Longwood" for the community located about five miles north of Grissetown on N.C. 904.

Much of the land in the vicinity of what is now called Longwood belonged to the Butlers before the Longs came to hold title to much of it through marriage, says David Bennett. Bennett, a resident of Hickman's Crossroads, has done extensive research on the Long and Butler families. Through his mother, Mrs. Wendell Bennett, David is a direct descendant of Daniel Lewis Butler, the first Butler to settle at what is now called Longwood.

"I love the Butler family," he says. He came to know them in part through the stories told by his great-aunt, Mary Aleen Long McCumbee, who still lives in the Longwood community and tends beautiful beds of flowers in her yard.

Butler was born in South Carolina around 1804, moving from there to Columbus County, and then, in the 1830s, to Brunswick County. He married Martha Ivey, perhaps the daughter of a Benjamin Ivey who was their next-door neighbor at the time of the 1850 U.S. Census. Ivey deeded Butler about 500 acres, which may have been Martha's dowry.

Their lands extended for possibly several thousand acres, including extensive wetlands along the Waccamaw River. Butler built a two-story home near what is now called Regan and a sawmill (and probably a gristmill as well) on what was called Butler's Pond—the dam and refurbished pond area are still visible today on N.C. 904. The 1860 agricultural census showed that he grew rice and raised sheep on about 1,000 acres, 700 of which were cleared. Descendants of Butler slaves still live in this area.

Daniel and Martha had children: Mary, Benjamin, John, Geneviva, Rossannah, Louisa, Francis and Myriam. Most of the girls married men from Columbus County. Two of the sons, Benjamin and John, served with Co. C, 30th Regiment, N.C. Troops, during the Civil War, Benjamin as a sergeant and John as a private.

John was captured at the battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse in 1864, imprisoned first at Point Lookout, Md., and then Elmira, N.Y., where he died of typhoid and was buried.

Benjamin was with Gen. Robert E. Lee at the surrender of Confederate troops at Appomattox Courthouse, Va. He returned home after the war and on Nov. 27, 1867, married Mary Melvina Cox. They began raising a family that included Daniel S., Mary Ellen, Susie, Johnny, Cornelia, Willie and Bessie Lee, who was David Bennett's great-grandmother.

Butler, who was a farmer and carpenter, built his own two-story home near Regan's Crossroads, with a separate kitchen. The ruin of that kitchen can still be seen on the Bryan and Jackie Smith farm at Longwood, along with the school that Butler built for use by a tutor he hired to teach his children and those of his neighbors.

Butler must have had a keen interest in education because "B.L. Butler of Waccamaw" appeared on a Feb. 12, 1872, list of the county school system's first "teachers" who received salaries from \$75 to \$160. On Oct. 8 of that year, he was one of the three men to be named to the county's first board of education.



THE LONG FAMILY stands in front of their home that was built in 1908 on what is now Russtown Road. On the front (from left) are Aleen Long, Gladstone Long and Francis (Fanny) Gore Long. At the back (from left) are W.A. "Jinx" Long, holding his son, Vinson; Bessie Butler Long, holding Herman Long, and John Melvin Long. Bessie's sister, Ellen Butler Ward stands on the porch in the left background.

But there was tragedy in the Butlers' lives as well as success. During the diphtheria epidemic of 1883, all the children except Mary Ellen and Bessie Lee contracted the disease and died, leaving no male descendants. Those five small graves lie in the Butler graveyard near Regan's Crossroads, now part of the George Ward Cemetery. Most of the wooden fence Butler built around the old cemetery still stands.

Benjamin's mother, Martha, died in January 1884, followed by Benjamin Butler on Aug. 22, 1885. His father, Daniel Butler, died in September 1887, "a very wealthy and prominent man for his time," says Bennett. In his will Butler divided between his granddaughters, Bessie and Mary Ellen, the tract on the Waccamaw River Swamp.

In 1888, Mary Melvina or "Grandma Mel" as she became known to her family, remarried, this time to Isiah or Isham McKeithan, a farm laborer and possibly overseer of the Butler farm.

It was at their home that Bessie Lee Butler married William Asbury "Jinx" Long on Feb. 24, 1907.

Mary Ellen, the younger of the two girls, married George Brooks Ward. Their family: Louis, Luther, Willie, George, Stella, Johnny, Hubert and Lula. As part

of her inheritance, Mary Ellen had received the old Butler place, which is how the Wards came to have holdings in the Regan's Crossroads area.

"Grandma Mel" had bought two large, illustrated Bibles, one for each of the girls, Bessie and Mary Ellen.

In her later years, Bessie developed diabetes and came to live with Aleen McCumbee around 1954. At Aleen's request, she brought her Bible with her. That was fortunate because, not long after, the house burned. Bessie died a few months later; Jinx had died in 1951.

Published in 1881, the edges of its pages tattered but the elaborate illustrations still vivid, the several-inches thick Bible is now "the family treasure," says Bennett, as is the family information contained in its records of births, deaths and marriages.

Jinx and Bessie Long reared a large family: Gladstone (called Glaxton, Glaston or Glayston in various records), Aleen, Vinson (David Bennett's grandfather), Herman, Lucille, Earl, Leamon, Bernell, William Asbury Long Jr. and Lavern.

But by the late 1910s and early 1920s, times got harder for the Longs. Patrons at the store were letting their accounts run up and Long couldn't collect. The Longs were "land poor," with plenty of acreage but no

cash. Unable to pay their own creditors, Jinx and Bessie began letting go of the land, one tract at a time. Among those most eager to buy: Jackson Brothers Railroad and Lumber Co., which was laying narrow-gauge railroad tracks into the swamps and forests of southeastern North Carolina and hauling out prime timber.

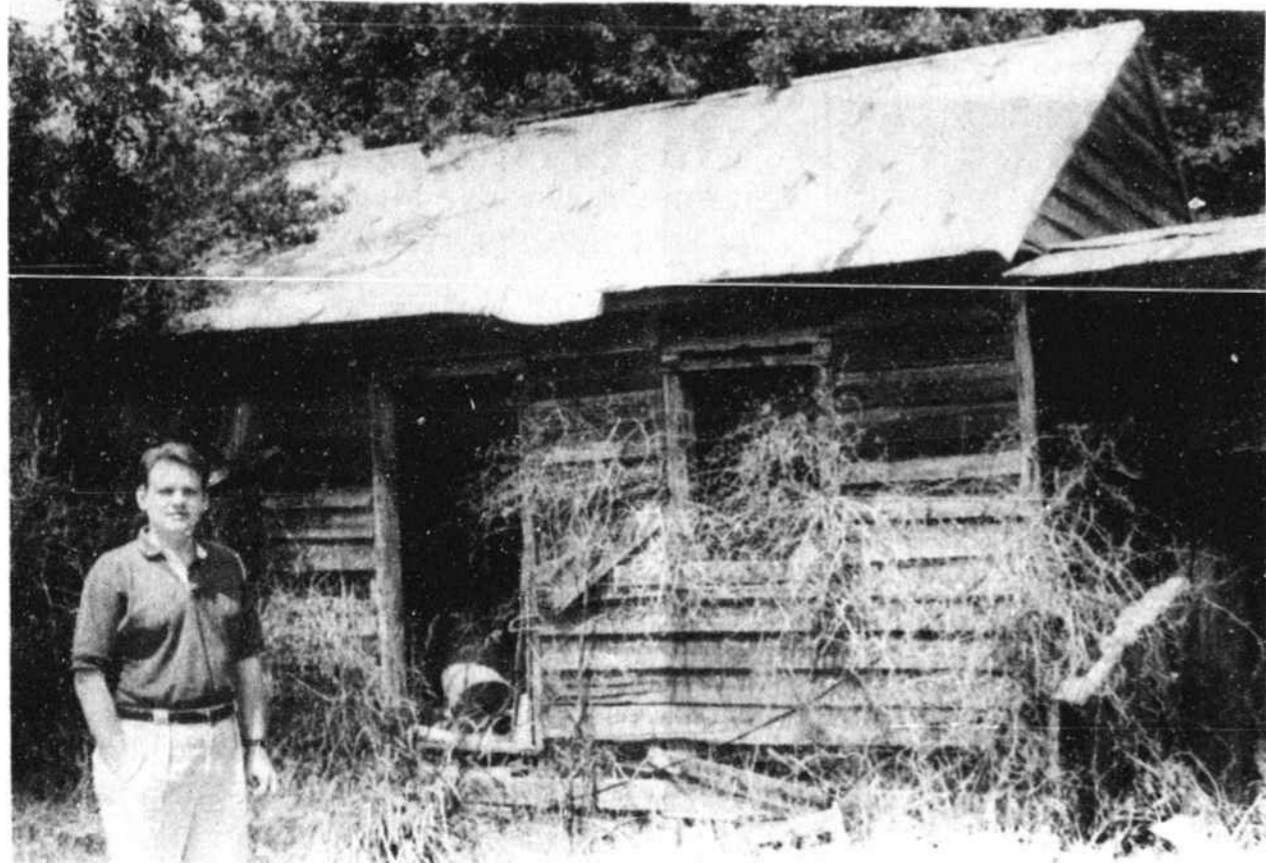
Around 1922 Jackson Brothers took over the mill on Butler's Pond and began clearing timber, Bennett learned in his research. It laid out a settlement nearby for its workers, building small frame cottages on streets and avenues bearing names such as "Peachtree" and "Sunset," and called the community Long's Wood—after the family who had sold the land.

The bustling community thrived as workers came from all around, drawn by the prospect of steady work and a good paycheck.

Entrepreneurs came as well, like Rice Gwynn of Fairmont. He opened a store and established a large farm that had numerous tenants working it. Also opening around this time were L.C. Brown's Grocery, D.S. Gore's, Ward's Grocery.

Jackson Brothers stayed around 10 years, gradually pulling out in the early 1930s.

(See LONGWOOD, Page 3-B)



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

DAVID BENNETT stands outside the schoolhouse built by Benjamin L. Butler for his and neighbors' children after the Civil War. It's now an outbuilding on the Bryan Smith farm on N.C. 904 at Longwood.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

BENJAMIN BUTLER carved the fencing around the Butler graveyard where his parents, Daniel and Martha Ivey Butler (headstones visible through gate) are buried, now part of the George Ward Cemetery.