

## The Sanborn Map of Winterville: Evidence of the Cox Family's Influence

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Historian J.L. Jackson once commented that the town of Winterville owes its existence primarily to two things: a cotton planter and a railroad (Winterville). Both machines came about because of one family, and their influence on the area known as Winterville is still evident today. The impact of the Cox family can be found by examining the structures that existed in the town during the early 20th century. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps are detailed designs that show landmarks, streets, and houses in a town. Created from 1867 to 1970, these documents assist in determining insurance prices and risks to homeowners. They also are used to record the changes and advancements that occur in an area over a period of time ("Maps and Atlases"). The map of Winterville, drawn in June 1919, displays buildings and structures that would not have existed were it not for John Cannon Cox and his descendants. Through his invention of the cotton planter, many members of his family became leaders and entrepreneurs, essentially creating a town around a railroad track.

John Cox owned a large amount of land between the areas now known as Winterville and Ayden. As a farmer, he began to search for improvements on the equipment that he worked with (Cox). The first improved cotton planter was made in 1874 and sold to Mr. Sylvester Procter for \$18.00. Cox sent a small model of the cotton planter to C.A. Snow in Washington City and received the first patent on March 14, 1876 (Pitt County 106). John Cox's son, Amos Graves, improved further and began to manufacture the cotton planter. He established A.G. Cox Manufacturing Company, an endeavor that set the stage for the creation of the town (Winterville). Along with receiving two additional patents for improvements and coining the

“Cox Improved Cotton Planter” (Cox), Amos Graves began producing lumber, meal, cotton, and coffins. By 1890 the company had grown tremendously and was producing approximately 1,000 cotton planters per year.

In 1890, the Atlantic Coastline Railroad was built near the company. As evident in the map, the railroad runs directly through the town. Amos Graves contracted to start a woodrack (Pitt County 104), which is a fueling station where trains stopped and reloaded with wood for their furnaces (Cox). He made a deal to load his cotton planters on the trains while they stopped at the woodrack (Power 342). He eventually gained permission to establish a depot. The map shows the railroad station in 1919 as containing a cotton shed, freight hold, office, and passenger station. This depot brought more people and goods into the town, which aided expansion (Cox).

In 1894, the company moved closer to the railroad, providing goods and services, as well as a large number of jobs that attracted people to the area (Cox). The Sanborn Map shows that this spot, located just south of Cooper Street, is the central feature of the downtown area. The bank, post office, barber shop, and grocery stores are all located within the blocks between the company and the railroad depot. A.G. Cox Manufacturing Company covers nearly two blocks with its storage units, mill, and service area. Since then the company has moved across the street, further from the railroad, and became Winterville Machine Works. As the production of cotton declined in the 1940's, the company began to perform equipment repairs and welding jobs for farmers. When Dupont began production in Kinston, it provided custom fabrication for the plant. The Cox family is still associated with the company, and Theodore Cox, an executive, serves as the fifth generation in the business (Cox).

Located just below the manufacturing plant along West Railroad Street is the Winterville Municipal Electric Light Plant. Through his company, Amos Graves Cox established a utilities system in the town. Winterville was the first town in Pitt County to have electricity. Cox Manufacturing Company provided the service, and they charge families by the number of light bulbs that they had (Winterville). Homes were restricted to 25-watt light bulbs, and businesses could only have 40-watt bulbs. Electricity was limited to the hours from 5:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. (Pitt County 105). At the time the map was made, there were no water facilities, as indicated in the header with the town statistics. However, Cox Manufacturing Plant later provided Winterville with one of the county's first waterworks systems. This supplied residents with plentiful amounts of drinking water (Power 345). The company capitalized on the natural resources of the area, such as the town's abundant supply of mineral water, and it helped create a comfortable living environment for the residents of the town (Cox).

Amos Graves Cox had a huge influence on naming and incorporating the town. He helped to develop a residential area for the town by selling half-acre lots of land to his employees (Power 342). Because of his land ownership, he also had a major influence on the decision of what the town should be called, suggesting names such as Coxville and Coxtown (Pitt County 105). The town of Winterville is known as "the town that grew around a woodrack" and has also been called "Mr. A.G. Cox's town" (Pitt County 104). The town was incorporated in 1897, and the name "Winterville" was picked from a list of Mr. Cox's business contracts.

The original charter for the town of Winterville prohibited the production or sale of liquor (Winterville). Amos Graves Cox also banned the sales of spirits on his property (Adams). This was most likely because of his strong belief in God and religion. Even today there is not an ABC

store located in the town. The firm morals of the Cox family helped maintain a virtuous town, which is apparent in the citizens today (Cox).

Southwest of the train depot is a strip of businesses including a drugstore. Amos Graves Cox's Beriah Thaddeus Cox, was the town's first doctor. Moving to Winterville in 1899, he provided his service to the citizens of the community (Winterville) and established a drugstore called B.T. Cox & Brothers. His store was a popular meeting place for citizens, and it supplied townspeople with many needed goods (Cox). The business was very beneficial to the town and its people.

On the corner of the same row of stores is the Bank of Winterville. Established in 1906, the bank conducted business of about \$1,000 a day. Amos Graves was one of the original stockholders, owning twenty shares. He was also the bank's first president (Cox). It was one of the only banks in North Carolina to stay open during the Depression (Winterville). Roy T. Cox, Amos Graves's son, was vice president during that time. The quality of loans that the bank made, and the people that were working there were the reason that it could remain open during such a trying economic time (Cox).

Another main attraction to the town of Winterville was the school located on Church Street. Amos Graves and his sister Nannie helped establish the education system in the town. The two-year boarding school called the Winterville Academy was built in 1895 (Pitt County 107). Dr. B. T. Cox and Amos Graves provided the land on which the school was built (Winterville). In 1899, Mr. J.L. Jackson and Miss Rosa Cox, Nannie's niece, took over leadership of the school. Winterville High School became the first secondary school in Pitt County in 1901 after the Neuse White Missionary Baptist Association expressed a need for a

high school in eastern North Carolina (Pitt County 107). This is supported on the map by the label on the area indicating the “Missionary Baptist High School.” In 1916, the school was shut down because the girls’ dormitory, located west of the classroom building, caught on fire. It reopened in 1920 as a state-operated school. Amos Graves was wary of the school being run by the state. He was concerned with the success of the school because of all the time and money he had devoted as one of the school’s eighteen trustees (Pitt County 107).

Across town, just north of the train station, is the site of the Winterville Public School for Negroes. Amos Graves also donated land for this institution, which later became known as Robinson Union School, which remained a black school until desegregation laws were put in place (Cox). Today, the same land is the location of W.H. Robinson Elementary School. The schools of Winterville were among the best in Pitt County (Adams). The town’s strong education system was most likely because of the high morals of the town’s citizens and their willingness to contribute to such a worthy cause (Power 345).

The Cox family had a strong belief in God, and they all had a great impact on the churches in Winterville. John Cox joined with other citizens to form the Antioch Baptist Church. He was elected as a deacon to the church, and he allowed the members to use his workshop as a temporary meeting place. A one room building was constructed and stood about a mile outside of the town, beyond the scope of the Sanborn map. The only funeral ever held in the church was that of the founder, John Cox. He was buried in what is now the Byrd Cemetery, located on Reedy Branch Road near highway eleven. His son, John David Cox, suggested that the church be moved into town. It is now known as Winterville Baptist Church, and is situated on the corner of Cooper and Church Streets (Pitt County 124). Amos Graves Cox was a leader in this church, as well as his son, Vernon. Another church that was established by the family

was St. Luke's Episcopal, located on Church Street near the academy. Amos Graves and Beriah Thaddeus donated land for this institution in 1902. Cox Manufacturing Company also donated money to buy pews for the church (Power 348). Amos Graves also donated land for Winterville Free Will Baptist Church in 1905 (Power 347), and George D. Cox, a cousin, helped to found Winterville Christian Church (Cox). In a town that is obviously based on religion and church, the Cox family definitely contributed to this aspect of the community.

Members of the Cox family made many contributions to Pitt County, which gained attention and support for the town of Winterville. Amos Graves Cox was on the first Pitt County Board of Education (Pitt County 26). Beriah Thaddeus Cox was a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives, representing Winterville and surrounding areas. Roy T. Cox, a county commissioner in the 1930's, was on the committee that created the tobacco quota (Cox). These positions helped Winterville receive equal funding and allowed the town to have a voice in county and state decisions.

John Cannon Cox and his lineage have had a huge impact on the town of Winterville, as evident through the structures displayed on the Sanborn maps. The family's innovative ideas and smart business decisions made a lasting impression on the town. A.G. Cox Manufacturing Company still operates today as Winterville Machine Works. Winterville High School is now a junior high school bearing the name A.G. Cox Middle School. Many of the churches that were established are still located on the original property and expanding every year, and the high morals and standards of the family are still evident through the citizens today. Comparing the Sanborn map of 1919 to the geography of present day Winterville, the town has expanded tremendously from its 500 citizens to a population of nearly 5,500 (Winterville). Despite the

growth and changes in the community, the simple structures apparent on the 1919 map can still be found today, and the influence of the Cox family is evident in every aspect of the town.

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