



Early A & R Train - hauling lumber

A&R Railroad Was Critical To Hoke County

by Paul Fu

The National Endowment for the Humanities is sponsoring a project at Richmond Technical College to study railroad history in the Sandhill region and its impact on Southern culture. All the member county libraries of the Sandhill Regional Library System, including Hoke, are invited to participate in the project and to contribute something to the researches.

Transportation is chiefly responsible for the growth and development of the United States. As the country expanded, the need for more rapid and efficient transit increased. This requirement was met by the railroad, probably the most important single form of transportation involved in the formation of the U.S. It was the railroad that aided the development of the State of North Carolina.

The growth of Hoke County can also be attributed to the success of the railroad. Around the turn of the century, one railroad was built through the heartland of the county, which would play a vital role in the lives of its citizens. It was the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad (A&R).

One of our residents told me: "If there were no A&R and Raeford Institute, present Raeford and Hoke County could not have existed."

A&R is particularly fortunate in its strategic location and set-up. Few short line railroads in the country have six different connections as has the one in our county. The road connects with the Seaboard Air Line at Aberdeen and with the Laurinburg & Southern; at Raeford it has a connection with the Laurinburg & Southern; at Skiko it connects with the Cape Fear Railway which road serves Fort Bragg and reservation, and at Fayetteville it connects with the Atlantic Coast Line and the Norfolk Southern. These alternate routes are indeed good insurance for a short line railroad.

After World War II when cars, trucks, and highways became very popular and partially replaced the functions of railroads/trains as transportation/delivery means, railroads gradually lost their traditional values. People, today, pay less and less attention to the roles which the railroads had long played in building this nation.

A&R, however, has its colorful history, which is inseparable from the growth of our country. It also has close connections with one of the pioneer families in the Sandhill region. Its builders, John Blue and Neil S. Blue (two brothers), pro-

bably contributed more to the prosperity of this region than any other old family members. I wrote an article on Dr. McFadyen's Mission to China, to which Mr. Niel S. Blue donated a substantial number of money to expand a Christian hospital in Hsueh-fu in early 1930s. This article is to analyze John Blue's successful story as a businessman and his family's contribution to the development of Hoke/Raeford region.

Mr. Blue was born within a farm in present Hoke County limit (Quewhiffle Township) in 1845. His parents were Neil McK. Blue and Eliza Smith, sturdy Scotch on both sides. His grandfather, John Blue, immigrated from Scotland in 1786 in early childhood and settled in the Sandhill Region. John's father, Peter Blue, was shot by Col. Thomas Wade's men near the Ford of Rockfish for his participation in the Piney Bottom massacre which had murdered a group of revolutionaries in 1781.

Mr. Blue joined the Confederate army and fought the War between the States for two years. In 1867, two years after closing the hostility, he began his life's battle, with a capital of not more than \$200 and from that time till 1890 he was actively engaged as turpentine "operator." He continued in that business for more than 20 years, branching out and constantly becoming a more important factor in that line of work. The secret of his success was that from the first he determined to keep inviolate all his obligations, and his reputation in that regard soon secured him unlimited credit, which, however, he had ever been chary of using.

In 1892, Mr. Blue chartered and began to build A&R Railroad, running from Aberdeen eastward through the land which he had the foresight to purchase in the days when it had but little money value. This enterprise had proved enormously profitable, and the railroad had been extended until it formed a connecting link with the Atlantic Coast Line, a few miles south of Fayetteville.

After a fight with ACL who at first refused to allow A&R to make a necessary crossing of the Coast-line tracks the expanding A&R entered Fayetteville and began catering to merchants. In 1931 the railroad company bought motor trucks and began door delivery. Merchandise was also handled in car load lots.

Firms in Raeford who had had a big part in keeping the railroad alive were: Hoke Oil and Fertz. Co., Hoke Concrete Works, Upchurch Milling Co., Burlington

Mills and the Johnson Company, all of which had been frequent carload lot shippers. Most all of the Raeford merchants used this method of receiving shipments, and many other firms shipped products out but on a smaller scale than those mentioned above.

Meanwhile, the A&R was one of the first railroads to install motor-driven passenger coaches. Its first one was put into service in 1920.

The inland waterway development of the Cape Fear river which gave Fayetteville a municipal port, caused the A&R to make its last extension of two miles in 1938. The extension connected the railroad with the port.

The railroad had had its ups and downs. The years between 1913 and 1918 were tough ones after the timberlands were cut over. The hardest blow yet was in 1918 when the government took over big railroad and completely ignored the little A&R. While the larger truck lines were getting a free facelift at the expense of the government, the A&R, short of labor and materials, watched their



John Blue, first president

roadbeds go bad and other equipment deteriorate.

The year of 1932 took its toll but the Aberdeen and Rockfish railroad pulled through and experienced easy sledding once again.

John died in 1922 leaving the operation of the railroad in the hands of his children. William

(Will) A., being the oldest, became President and Chairman of the board upon his father's death. William was ably assisted by his brother Henry McCoy and Habert J., who served as Associate Vice-President. A sister, Louise became active in the running of the railroad serving as Secretary of the Board of Directors and later, after William's death, as Chairman of the Board. Another sister, Kate (Mrs. John Graham), preferred to stay out of active participation. However, she remained in close contact with her family and their railroad activities as a stockholder in her father's company. John's oldest son, Clifton, died in 1912.

Will Blue was succeeded by his brother Henry McCoy Blue in 1954, guided the railroad through the 50's. He was assisted by his Vice President, Forrest Lockey, a very able and capable railroad man who had worked his way up through A&R ranks.

Upon the death of Henry Blue in 1960, Forrest Lockey became the first man outside the Blue family to serve as President of the railroad.

During his tenure there was an expansion in rail service for the A&R. Bigger rail cars with increased commodity demand of A&R customers came into being. Newer and more powerful radio equipped engines were purchased to move increased loads. Heavier rail was installed to take care of the demands of increasing traffic.

The retirement of Mr. Lockey in 1975 brought another man into the office of the President who had worked his way up the A&R ranks. Willard Formyduval, who took office April 1, 1975 was, in the tradition of his predecessors, a forward looking man seeking to improve the status and services of this small but thriving railroad.

The Blue family, however, still retains its control of the railroad through membership on the A&R's Board of Directors. John Blue, son of William A. and Richard and William Blue, son of Halbert J. are active in their participation in guiding the affairs of the Aberdeen and Rockfish.

Although the Aberdeen and Rockfish railroad has lost its original role as the important



Aberdeen & Rockfish Jitney

transportation means for our county and few Blue family members still live here (Mrs. Kate Covington, niece of Neil S. Blue, lives in North Magnolia Street of Raeford), we, Hoke citizens, should not forget the railroad which once helped our region become prosperous and deliver invaluable services to our residents and business for almost half a century.

Meanwhile, we should also pay a high respect to a family for so many of its members have made significant contributions to the growth and development of the Sandhill

region as well as the strengthening of our Southern culture.

This article is based on Local History/Genealogy collection of Hoke County Library and a personal collection from Ms. Joyce C. Monroe, Vice President of United Carolina Bank and author of "Progress Since 1903," History of the Bank of Raeford.

John Blue was also the first president of the Bank of Raeford when it was established in 1903. Special thanks are extended to Ms. Monroe for making this article possible.



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