

The Destiny of the Sandhill Country

By BION H. BUTLER*

THE phenomenal development of Moore county continues at a rate that astonishes everybody familiar with it. It is doubtful if anywhere in the South is anything on the same scale, and the signs all point to a further movement that will make the present look like child's play.

In the last three or four weeks many thousand acres of land have changed hands, and the prices paid are such that others besides me have taken a second look. This year the Buchanan orchard of forty acres sold peaches enough to more than pay the cost of the thing, and last week an option on the place for \$12,000 was bought by L. L. Johnson. This is three times what the whole 2,000 acre tract was offered for about twenty years ago, and the whole farm has made close to \$75,000 worth of stuff this year. James Swett half a dozen years ago bought less than 200 acres of land near Niagara and planted an orchard and built a house. The place has long ago paid for itself, but he sold it few days ago to Lee Page for \$30,000. And three miles away the government is protesting that the people whose land is taken for Camp Bragg are profiteering when they ask ten dollars an acre.

In the last two or three weeks a scheme has been talked over to connect up all the territory from west of Pinehurst to east of Southern Pines, in a distance of about ten miles, and make of it a continuous park. This is the most pretentious and at the same time the most simple proposition I have ever heard of of its kind. It is pretentious for it includes twenty thousand acres of land and the big resorts of both Pinehurst and Southern Pines, hundreds of acres of the best peach orchards in this section, and the construction of miles of road, and the building of innumerable new homes. Yet it is a simple proposition, for the land has all been gathered into strong hands favorable to the scheme, and they are not only going to carry it through, but they will make a lot of money out of it, and make the vast park the prince of resorts and one of the most elaborate fruit developments in the United States.

Beginning at Pinehurst and running out toward the famous Van Lindley orchard which has been bought by Pinehurst interests, a pair of avenues will be built, one for eastbound traffic and the other for the other direction. This will mean two broad avenues fit for any kind of traffic, and broad enough to handle all of it. Between the two broad roads will be a park, and on the outside of each of them will be parks, and outside of the parks walks for foot passengers. The pair of avenues will be fronted with homes built by winter visitors to this section on tracts of land that will run five and ten acres to the lot. These lots will be sold with building restrictions, and the type of buildings will be in keeping



REMINISCENT OF THE OLD SOUTH

with park plans that will govern the whole unit.

By the time the eastern boundary of the Van Lindley property is reached comes the six thousand acres bought by H. A. Page, Jr., from the Von Herf property. Mr. Page has a force of men now on his land making roads, and he will build miles of improved road throughout the entire territory. His roads will connect with the Pinehurst roads where his land joins the Van Lindley orchard property, and he will carry the scheme through to Manly and Southern Pines, and the same idea of five and ten acre building lots to sell to high-class buyers will prevail. For a distance of ten miles probably this road system will extend through the district, and it will be located at such advantageous points that the best features of the landscape will be emphasized.

The success of the venture is always its important phase. But this is not one that is worrying the men back of this thing, for before the proposition had been publicly announced the rumors of it had passed around sufficiently that numerous inquiries for locations on the new avenues had come in from all directions, and before he has one of the lots marked off yet ready for sale. Mr. Page has a pocket-ful of letters from all over the country, even as far as the Pacific coast, asking about his scheme.

The Sandhill county is just waking up to the fact that it has two or three things that people with money are willing to pay for. These things include first of all the incomparable climate. If a Wall street broker could buy within fifty miles of New York five acres of land with the Moore county climate he would not hesitate a minute to give ten thousand dollars an acre for it. He can get all the land he wants up there somewhere in New York or Eastern Pennsylvania for a small handful of pocket change, but in winter he can't dig it out of the snow. So he heads for

North Carolina, where he gets climate with his land, and he does not mind paying a few thousand dollars for a few acres of land in a climate that he regards as perfection. A thousand dollars means an interest charge of sixty dollars a year, and sixty dollars does not look like money to him when he can put his family and himself in a climate like that of the Sandhills.

Then there is another advantage. He finds that his friends are locating in the same neighborhood, and his land has the added value to him of location. Location is what makes land worth millions along Wall street and nothing up in Labrador, although both may have the same acreage. A Moore county location is convenient to five or six eighteen-hole golf courses, with more to be built, and that is worth money to the Northern man who is hunting a winter home in the climate belt. He figures that when he picks his location. And that he is among people of his own habits and from his own section adds more to the location, so he willingly adds on a little more to get what he wants. Also he figures here is a place that can be reached within one night's run from New York, which is another feature. It is only a short run in his car, and over good roads and roads that are getting better every day, and it is a location with good roads all around it. Location makes values.

Then comes this peach business. A bearing peach tree is worth from two to three dollars now, and as it will bring that much from its crop in one year the value is not high. Two hundred trees to the acre means that an acre of bearing orchard is worth from \$400 to \$600, and that seems to be about the price that peach men are looking on as a fair thing. The peach orchard looks like something interesting to the Northern newcomer, and he is dropping his money into hundreds of acres of it. It is a fact that nowhere on earth makes finer peaches than the

North Carolina Sandhills, and they bring the prices, for they go into market at a time when nothing else is there, and they are so close to the markets that they get there in good shape. A peach orchard that has been planted five years and has not paid for itself to the last cent is not rated as a very successful plant in the Sandhills. After that it is all velvet if it is cared for right, and most of them are. So peach orchards are worth money, and peach land is attractive to the investor. It may surprise you, but a good peach location could easily stand to pay \$500 for an acre of wild land, for that means only thirty dollars a year interest, and crops that will bring maybe a thousand dollars an acre can easily afford to pay interest amounting to sixty.

It is not wholly climate that makes the Sandhills a peach country. It is the hills. The ridges are between six and seven hundred feet above tidewater, as shown by the United States coast survey work last summer in the region. The valleys drop off two or three hundred feet lower. The result is an air drainage that just fits the peach. Cool nights in the spring, cold air drains from the ridges to the valleys, and the trees in blossom on the ridges are not hurt by frost as the cold air has gone into the valleys, and there the frost line is shown by the blackened vegetation, while on the ridges everything is as green as in summer. That spring frost line caused by the air drainage of the hills is the life of the Sandhills peach proposition, and it is worth a lot of money to every acre of peach land. Peach men do not hesitate to pay it. On account of this peculiarity of safety from spring frosts the Sandhill county is destined to be a vast succession of peach orchards, for the industry is expanding faster right now than at any previous time and on a broader and more systematic basis.

Climate was the first thing that was discovered to have a value in the Sandhill county. Then having found climate, location gradually grew to be worth money, and is growing more valuable every day. With that has come the hill topography. I omit the minor influences like tobacco, dewberries, and other factors like that, which help, for the first three are the big forces. They are making the lands of Moore county take on these phenomenal prices, and I do not think it is to be a great while until Moore county land will be priced higher than any other rural property in the State. I expect within the next two years to see land two miles from a postoffice or railroad station go on the books at the recorder's office at a thousand dollars an acre, and more than that would not surprise me.

*From the Raleigh News and Observer

