

Frank Page Was Prime Mover In Sandhills Growth

BY ROBERT MASON

Allison Francis Page, who had prospered before the Civil War but had fared no better than his poor state in its aftermath, came from Cary to the Sandhills in 1880 to explore lumbering prospects. He was 55 years old. Flings at cotton and tobacco manufacturing had put him in debt \$10,000—a lot of money.

Moving on was in his blood. The first North Carolina Page, Lewis, wandered down from the Virginia back country to settle in Granville County. There Lewis' son Anderson was born in 1790. Anderson acquired a 1,200-acre farm and 30 to 50 slaves. Also, he ran a wagon train hauling market crops from Wake County, where he settled, to Petersburg, on the Appomattox River (which the Virginia political establishment favored as a port over Norfolk on the proposition that Norfolk was too close to the ocean and hence too far from commodities). Anderson's son, Allison Francis, who was called Frank, was born in Wake in 1824.

When Frank Page poked into the turpentine-drained longleaf pines that shaded mile after mile after mile of this region, he knew what he was about. As a young fellow he had got into the lumber trade furnishing stringers for the pioneering Raleigh and Gaston Railroad, then rafted logs down the Cape Fear River from Fayetteville. In Fayetteville he had courted and, in 1849, married Catherine Frances Rabateau, a strong-willed girl who had attended Louisville Academy. Like Frank, Miss Kate was a Methodist.

Five or so years later Frank bought 400 acres of woodland eight miles west of Raleigh, near a rail line. He set up a steam-powered lumber mill and founded a village, which he named Cary in honor of a Methodist fundamentalist who preached prohibition. Frank hated rum. He didn't think much of rebellion either; when the Civil War broke out in '61, he formed no regiment and joined no company. He paid allegiance to the Confederate government and sawed wood when needed, but that was about all. The South as it had been "fo' de wa"—before The War—never misted his eyes.

During Reconstruction he was

too busy to look back—too busy trying to get going again and to raise a family. His family, if not his bank account, was substantial when he took the Raleigh-Augusta Air Line cars to these parts. His No. 2 son, 21-year-old Robert N., came with him. There were three younger sons and three daughters at home, and an older son, newly settled in St. Joseph, Mo., breaking in as a journalist and freelance writer.

Within a month or so, Mr. Page and Robert erected a lumber mill at Blue's Crossing in Moore County and began feeding it trees cut from a tract purchased from Archibald Ray, of the Bethesda community. The father found a boarding place, from which he commuted to Cary on weekends, and the son made do in two-room diggings.

After a year, Mr. Page built a house and brought his family to Blue's Crossing. Soon he and the four boys with him owned about 15,000 acres of timber stretching southward and westward from their lumber plant. They opened logging roads and constructed tramways. In 1888 they graduated to iron rails and full-size steam locomotives. They expanded their mills and factories and generated satellite businesses.

Blue's Crossing became Aberdeen—officially in 1887, when the U.S. Post Office introduced an Aberdeen postmark, unofficially somewhat earlier.

Major spinoffs of the Page lumber operation were the Page Trust Company, a bank that the Great Depression ruined, and the Aberdeen and West End Railroad, which became the Aberdeen and Asheboro, was absorbed into the Norfolk and Southern and then the Southern systems, and lately has been born again as the little Aberdeen and Briar Patch, chugging between Aberdeen and Star. In 1890 Mr. Page retired from the lumber business and concentrated on the railroad.

The father was president when the railroad was chartered. Robert N. Page was secretary-treasurer, Junius R. Page was superintendent, and Henry A. Page was general freight and traffic manager. The final son, Frank C. Page, would add his name to the letterhead. The first,

Walter Hines Page, having moved from a St. Joseph newspaper through a series of writing and editing positions to national prominence, in 1899 would become co-founder of a New York publishing house—but old Mr. Page worried about that one's business acumen.

There was little doubt as to who ran the fledgling railroad. President Page "employed a civil engineer," J.N. Cole wrote in an admiring sketch of him, "but when plans of his engineer did not suit him he brushed them aside and worked out his own plans."

Yet in 1898, Cole continued in "Biographical History of North Carolina," which Samuel A. Ashe edited, Mr. Page turned the Aberdeen and Asheboro over to his four sons in the Sandhills. Here they did well indeed, in civic and political as well as in business and agricultural affairs.

Robert became the first mayor of Aberdeen, a member of the North Carolina General Assembly, a United States Congressman, and unsuccessful candidate for governor. Frank was appointed by Governor Thomas W. Bickett as the state's first proper highway commissioner soon after returning from France and taking off his World War I uniform as a major of army engineers. Junius, nicknamed Cris, headed the bank and was a leader in introducing peach-growing to the Sandhills. Cole judged Henry, state wartime food commissioner, legislator, and railroad executive, to be the ablest of the lot.

"Had he chosen one of the professions, he would have doubtless come to an elevation few men attain," Cole wrote for historian Ashe. "Had he chosen journalism, he would have made a great editor. Had he chosen law, he would have taken rank with the masters. Had he chosen letters, he would have had companion with the great spirits of literature."

Over in Raleigh, Josephus Daniels, editor of the News and Observer, was inclined to agree—although he did not share Cole's elation that the 80-mile Page railroad was "the largest built by private capital in North-Carolina." Incident to an account



Allison Francis Page

of Judge Walter Clark's campaign to be Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, Daniels wrote in "Editor in Politics" (1941):

"Henry A. Page, president of the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad, a railroad somewhat longer than it is wide, built by his father as a lumber road, and afterwards extended into three or four counties, took up the cudgels against Clark in The News and Observer. He was a brilliant writer. I sometimes thought if he had devoted himself to it, he would have been a more brilliant writer than his brother, Walter Hines Page. He wielded a trenchant pen and wrote interestingly and vigorously..."

Besides eventually selling the railroad, the Pages sold the land that had nurtured the trees the railroad hauled. The story is

timberland when all the value was in the trees. The Tufts cash was pure bonus.

Indeed, "Uncle Jesse" Page, a Methodist preacher back in Wake County, based a sermon on the transaction. Instructing a congregation that everything God created was for man's benefit, he said that after the Sandhills pines were felled the land lay fallow until an unforeseen use was found for it—and suddenly, lo and behold, a poor region became one of the state's most valuable.

Josephus Daniels knew all the Pages. Robert was a groomsmen at his wedding. As a young newsman in Wilson Daniels had gone to Raleigh at Walter's invitation to relieve him as editor of the State Chronicle for two weeks, and subsequently had assumed his chair. Allison Francis Page had helped him then by buying \$100 worth of stock in the Chronicle.

Mr. Page made considerably larger investments than that in Raleigh in his latter years. He built the Raleigh Hotel and Page Opera House. One day, Daniels said, Mr. Page paid him a call at The News and Observer, which Daniels had acquired and merged with the Chronicle. He brought advice. It was to devote less newspaper space to baseball and more to church news.

Upon Mr. Page's death in Raleigh in 1899, Daniels wrote: "Mr. A.F. Page was the best type of lumber kings in the South, but he was much more than that. He was an upstanding man of positive convictions and high character."

For all his grasp of commerce and ethics, Mr. Page could no more figure out his son Walter Hines than another North Carolina Methodist of his time, old Washington Duke, could fathom his son James Buchanan.

Mr. Page recognized and appreciated his firstborn's brilliance, Daniels wrote in "Editor in Politics." Nevertheless, "he didn't think Walter knew a thing about a dollar. Walter had come on a visit to his father, who owned a telegraph line on his railroad out from Aberdeen. Mr. Page said, 'You know, if I had a man like Walt at both ends of my telegraph line, I would make a fortune if they could pay their bills. He will sit down and write a

telegram of three or four hundred words two or three times a day. Think of the extravagance and waste of it! Why, I never sent a telegraph in my life longer than ten words. If I had two men like that I would get rich on my telegraph line."

Walter Hines Page was Ambassador to the Court of St. James during the First World War. His career is spelled out in a

four-volume biography published internationally. He too wrote of his father's death. It left him "lonelier than I ever felt before; for it has somehow pushed me forward from the almost youthful attitude that I had continued to assume that I held in the family," he confided to a friend. "It is a severe shock to find that of a large group I am suddenly become the senior."

John T. Patrick

(Continued From Page 1)

Washington Barracks. "They sent for Carl, who was able to get an emergency furlough," Mrs. Patrick said. "He came to Southern Pines and was with his father when he died. I think he (the elder Patrick) was pleased with the development of Southern Pines. It had running water, some paved streets, a lot of hotels and big houses."

The elder Patrick had been to visit his son and new daughter-in-law at Washington earlier that year. "He was a very strict dietician," she recalled. "There was no alcohol, no coffee, very little meat and you didn't fry anything, either. When he came to our house in Washington we just put the coffee pot away."

Later in the summer of 1918, Mrs. Patrick said she went to Chimney Rock to visit her father-in-law at the Esmeralda Inn, in which she said he had a financial interest and which was run by Tom and Tillie Turner. He also was engaged in another real estate venture in Chimney Rock.

"Daddy Patrick told me he had planned to live to be 100 years old," Mrs. Sadie Patrick recalled. "He liked me very much." However, after his death she said a depression came along and it was necessary to dispose of his land holdings. He is buried in Wadesboro.

Mrs. Patrick's father, Henry Bilyeu, was one of the early noted horticulturists in North Carolina. He has been recognized as a pioneer in establishing the dewberry as a profitable crop.

Bilyeu's father was a New Jersey fruit grower and the son grew up on a fruit farm, coming to Warren County, N.C., in 1874. Bilyeu was a fruit grower there for 15 years but in 1890 came to Moore County as one of the

pioneer settlers.

He bought 20 acres east of the then town boundaries where he had an extensive vineyard. This now is part of the Elks Club golf course. Then in 1903 Bilyeu bought 300 acres four miles west of Southern Pines which he developed as the then widely acclaimed Pine Knot Farm. The crops there included dewberries and Delaware grapes which he introduced into Moore County.

This property, now known as the C. Louis Meyer farm, was Mrs. Patrick's home until about the time of her marriage to Carl, who she said, remained in the Army until he retired as a first lieutenant. He died in 1956 and is buried in Pinebluff.

After her husband's death, Mrs. Patrick worked as a licensed practical nurse for some 20 years. She and her husband had four children, including twin sons, Walter and John, another son, James, and a daughter, Ethel. All three sons served in the Air Force. John is dead. She has seven grandchildren.

"Daddy Patrick was quite a character," Mrs. Patrick said. "He was a big man at the time but he did spread himself very thin."

COUNTY SEAT MOVED

In 1796, the county seat was permanently located on 60 acres given by Richardson Fagin, a beautiful tract on the Salem Road. In leisurely fashion, 64 lots were sold around the square where at last the courthouse was built. Carthage was the classical name given the town.

MOORE COUNTY ACADEMY
The Moore County Academy was established by legislative act in 1799. No records of the school's operation survive, and its life must have been short.

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