

Senator Umstead and Horse He Got As Boy Shared 33 Years OF Work And Pleasure



THE UMSTEAD FAMILY—Shown here are Senator William B. Umstead, Mrs. Umstead and their five-year-old daughter, Merle Bradley. This picture was taken at the Umstead residence in Durham. Mrs. Umstead is the former Miss Merle B. Davis of Rutherford County.

Durham, April 26.—This is a little-known story of a Durham County farm boy who became a U. S. Senator and a little black mare, which shared 33 years of his life.

It is a story of devotion and hard work shared by a North Carolina farm boy and his horse. Like so many good stories of American life, it reflects the character and growth of a boy whose industry and integrity carried him to successful career as an attorney and public official.

It all began one day in 1904 when a trim black colt was born on the tobacco farm of the late John W. Umstead in the northern part of this county. To the world this was no special event, but to the Umstead family and especially to Bill, a slender, sandy-haired lad of nine, it was a day of great excitement.

As Bill expected, the long-legged colt was given to him to raise as his own horse. He promptly named her Robbie, in honor of a favorite school

teacher whose first name was Roberta.

Under Bill's loving care, Robbie grew into a compactly-built little horse with a gentle disposition and stout heart. Her small but well-shaped body and fine head gave evidence to the good blood lines of her ancestors. While there was no doubt Robbie was more than a common work animal, to Bill she was the world's finest example of equine beauty, strength and intelligence.

By scrimping and saving like most farm boys with little cash income, Bill managed to buy a black, rubber-tired buggy which Robbie pulled with an effortless trot that covered miles of dusty Durham County roads.

Yet all was not play for the farm boy and his horse. Like most farms, life on the Umstead tobacco farm required long hours of work. Always an industrious lad, Bill did not mind the work, but he was anxious to see that no one else handled Robbie, so he hurried home each day from his

country school to make certain that he alone worked the little mare.

Years passed, Bill completed high school with a good record and prepared to enter the University of North Carolina. He and Robbie spent a busy summer before he left for Chapel Hill, and he departed for college with the solemn understanding from the Umstead family that Robbie would continue to receive the best care and handling.

Bill did well at Chapel Hill, and at the close of his freshman and sophomore years, returned home to the farm to team up with Robbie and make a tobacco crop so he could pay his way through school the next year. Robbie also provided transportation during the summer days for social outings and picnics. This arrangement worked fine until the summer before the boy's last year. His father was growing old and had been unable to put in a tobacco crop, so Bill returned home for the summer faced with the serious problem of making enough money to replace the tobacco cash income and complete his college education.

His equipment consisted of Robbie and himself—an alert, serious-minded young man with an inherited and acquired capacity for hard work. For a start he worked at a saw mill for one dollar a day. Then his father discovered that a road construction gang was planning to build a concrete bridge on a state highway nearby, so Bill went over to see the construction superintendent about a job.

With his horse and another one he rented, and a wagon, Bill was given the back-breaking task of hauling sand from the river bottom to the bridge site. Working steadily from dawn until dusk six days a week, the boy and his team soon proved to the superintendent that they could handle the job. It was not easy work for the boy or the horse. Bill had to drive the wagon into the bottom, load a square yard of sand by hand and then his sturdy little team of horses had to pull the loaded wagon from the deep sand up to the bridge site.

One week before school resumed at Chapel Hill, Bill and Robbie and the new horse completed the job. It meant six days a week of grueling labor under the summer sun from a week after school closed in May until the first week of September. But accustomed to hard work, Bill had hauled sand every day, except Sundays, for his entire summer vacation and made enough money to send him back to Chapel Hill for his senior year.

He was graduated from the University in 1916 with an excellent record as an intercollegiate debator and winner of the coveted Mangum Medal. Robbie was then 12 years old. Bill went to Kinston to teach school, and Robbie was moved into the village of Bahama, where Bill's father had gone to live because Mr. Umstead was getting too old to farm. Most of the work animals were sold . . . but sell Robbie? Impossible! She was a member of the family.

In May, 1917, Bill Umstead left his teaching job and friends in Kinston to enlist in the Army, received brief training at Fort Oglethorpe and was sent overseas with a machine gun company, where he saw combat service in France. Robbie waited at home with Bill's father.

Returning from service in 1919, the young veteran entered law school at Trinity College, now Duke University. This kept him near his aging father, and Robbie once again was serving her beloved master.

Obtaining his law license in August, 1920, Bill began the practice of law in July, 1921, and was elected Prosecuting Attorney of the Durham County Recorder's Court in 1922 and was re-elected in 1924. His industry, integrity and character won him election in 1926 as Solicitor of the Tenth Judicial District and he was re-elected in 1930.

During these years Robbie remained

with Bill's father in Bahama. When he passed away in 1937, Robbie was boarded with friends in Durham County. The busy life of a public official prevented Bill from many rides on his horse, but he never considered the possibility of selling Robbie. In 1929 Bill Umstead married and moved into Durham to live.

Time passed and in 1932 Bill Umstead (Continued on Page Eight)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(Continued From Page Nine)

every man. We should appreciate the priceless heritage which has come down to us.

The best test of the value of the Bible is its own contents. No person can read it deliberately and thoughtfully without being improved and having higher ideals for life and conduct. The literature of the world and experience of mankind is a sufficient test to the miracle-working power of the Holy Scripture in the lives of mankind. Everyone should adopt some method of studying this great religious record.

Careful, thoughtful reading of the Bible will result in a definite change of the individual for the better. Greatly needed in our nation today is more regular reading of God's word. The Expositor's Dictionary of Texts, however, points out that "the Word of God must also be practiced. Those people (the Jews in Ezra's time) put their Word of God into practice. Our life must be a life of repentance, of joy, of peace, of love, of wholehearted devotion and obedience, and of love, and unselfish sympathy. The Word became the power of God in their life."

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