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PHILIP KEYES YONGE

1850-1934

By OCCIE CLUBBS

Numerous members of the old English family of Philip Keyes Yonge were natives of colonial Georgia and Florida, some held office under the crown of England in both states, <sup>1</sup> and it was at Fernandina, in 1818; then nominally Spanish territory, that his father, Chandler Cox Yonge, was born. The latter became a lawyer early and was scarcely twenty when he served as assistant secretary of the first Florida constitutional convention held at St. Joseph. <sup>2</sup> Five years later he was elected to the Florida state senate.

In 1845 he was appointed by President. Polk United States district attorney for Florida, and reappointments for two other terms followed. Upon the secession of Florida he served in the same office for the Confederate States, and later was quartermaster in the Confederate service with the rank of major and stationed in Tallahassee.

While living near Marianna his son, Philip, was born on May 27, 1850. The family moved to Pensacola in 1859 and both lived there the remainder of their lives. Both attended the University of Georgia, and Philip received the degrees of A.B. (1871), and A.M. and LL.B. (1872). Membership in Phi Beta Kappa attests his scholarship. Returning to Pensacola he entered business instead of the law and after several years, in 1876, began his connection

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(1) His great, great grandfather, Henry Yonge, in 1755 was a member of the lower house of the Georgia colonial legislature; surveyor-general of Georgia in 1764; and a member of the King's Council in 1770. His great grandfather, Philip Yonge, was commissioned surveyor-general of Georgia in 1778. What Philip's brother, Henry, was attorney-general of Florida and member Of the King's Council at St. Augustine.

(2) *Proceedings*. . . . (St. Joseph, 1339) p. 118.

(3) *Georgia Alumni Record*, July, 1932, p. 122.

with the manufacture and export of lumber which continued more than fifty years. He was secretary of the Muscogee Lumber Company until 1889, assistant manager of its successor, the Southern States Land and Timber Company, until 1891, manager of the New York office for a year, and manager of its Muscogee mills until the company went into receivership when he was manager for the receivers. When, in 1898, the corporation was reorganized as the Southern States Lumber Company he became vice president and general manager, and was president from 1903 until 1930, when having cut all its timber, which exceeded 400,000 acres, it liquidated its business and he retired from active business life at the age of eighty.

The agricultural value of cut-over pine lands in the Pensacola region was imperfectly known until in 1899 Mr. Yonge established a demonstration farm and ranch and later added a modern dairy. Here for many years, in addition to the lumber business, he was an extensive and successful farmer; and that farm through continuous experiments and with daily visitors greatly influenced the progress of agriculture in the region.<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of the perplexities of a large industrial organization, the most extensive of its kind in that region, he found time to serve his community, and in civic and patriotic capacity he was alderman from 1905 to 1909, was president of the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce in 1908, and chairman of the War Camp Community Service and Agricultural Advisor to the District Exemption Board during the World War.<sup>5</sup>

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(4) He compiled and published a pamphlet of 60 pages comprising papers by agricultural experts written for him on the agriculture of the region. See Lib. Cong. card: *The Perùido Country*.

(5) *Who's Who*. 1926.

Imbued with the spirit of progress Mr. Yonge kept pace with the intellectual movements of the time. His single-hearted allegiance to educational opportunity in his city, county, and state met with such success that he is known as an educational leader throughout Florida,<sup>6</sup> and in this sphere lies his greatest contribution to the well-being of his fellow-men. From 1876 to 1890 he was a member of the Escambia county school board except for one term, and during this period the foundation of public education there was laid. From its inception in 1921 until his death he was chairman of the Board of Trustees of the special tax school district which includes Pensacola, and under that board all of the modern school buildings of the district were built.

In these local contacts, as in those of larger statewide import, there was nothing dogmatic nor self-assertive, for irreproachable courtesy marked his dealings with all. He was precise and cautious, and kept down factious opposition. No educational crisis found him unequal to it and he always piloted to a safe anchorage.

On the consolidation of the State schools in 1905 and the establishment of the University, the Florida State College for Women, the Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, and the School for the Deaf and the Blind, Mr. Yonge was appointed a member of their Board of Control. Except for one term he served continuously until his retirement in 1933 at the age of eighty-three, and for the last twenty years was chairman. Though its meetings were held several hundred miles from his home, he

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(6) Dr. John J. Tigert, President of the University of Florida, said (Jacksonville *Times-Union*, Aug. 10, 1934) : "Florida has lost one of her most useful citizens. He was a man **who had** dedicated his life to public service. Taking all the institutions of the State into consideration, he did more for education than any other man **in** Florida."

attended 336 of 340. Concurrently he was chairman of the State Plant Board from its inception.'

The guiding spirit of his work with the presidents of these institutions and all with whom he labored was cooperation, and practical commonsense was the mainspring of his actions.\* Recognition for this service came to him in good measure before his death: One of the largest schools in Pensacola bears his name. He was given the Kiwanis cup inscribed, "In appreciation of the most noteworthy public service rendered the city of Pensacola during the year 1931." At the University of Florida he was awarded membership in Phi Kappa Phi, and in the interval between his terms on the Board of Control the University conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws upon him. Its annual for 1933 was dedicated to him.<sup>9</sup> Upon his retirement the legislature of Florida passed a joint resolution of appreciation of his serv-

(7) There was no emolument to any of these local or state offices, and when the legislature proposed to attach a salary to membership on the Board of Control he threatened to resign. *F. S. C. W. Alumnae Bulletin*, October 1934, p. 7.

(8) In the *Flastacowo*, the Florida State College for Women annual, 1931, which was dedicated to Dr. Yonge, Dr. Edward Conradi, President, wrote: "Ever since the University and the College were established he has woven the ideals of his life into these institutions with such fundamental ability, such a fine sense of honor, a sound and constructive idealism and never failing goodwill that they will be an asset to them and to the State in the years to come."

President J. R. E. Lee of the A. & M. College for Negroes said: "Dr. Yonge . . . . labored incessantly to make the school a blessing to all Florida and to inspire the colored people."

(9) "The students of the University of Florida congratulate you, Doctor Yonge, upon your long service. We deem it a privilege to dedicate the Seminole of 1933 to you as a partial expression of the love and appreciation which we bear to one of Florida's noblemen."

ices to education in the State. <sup>10</sup> His most noteworthy concrete memorial is the P. K. Yonge Laboratory School of the University, which at the time of its completion and dedication to him in 1934 was the outstanding plant for its purpose in the country. <sup>11</sup>

In 1876 Mr. Yonge married Lucie C. Davis, who died in 1932. Of nine children, five survived him. He was a life-long member of the Episcopal Church and long a vestryman of Christ Church parish at Pensacola.

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(10) *Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 8 (April 20, 1933) :*

Whereas, after a long life, rich in public service, the fullness of years has prompted the Honorable Philip Keyes Yonge, one of the most useful of Florida's sons, to withdraw from active personal participation in the affairs of our State: and

WHEREAS, his ability, loyalty, zeal and idealism, especially in the field of education, have been always actively manifested in the concerns of his city, county, state and nation, and of right entitled him to a peculiar and prominent distinction among our citizens ; and

WHEREAS, for nearly twenty-five years as a member of the Board of Control of institutions of higher learning-eighteen of which he was chairman-he served with a devotion that comes only from self-consecration to a high purpose; and

WHEREAS, his recent resignation causes us to lose from our councils the wisdom that has come, to him from long and varied experience ; now therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Florida, that we extend to this distinguished citizen our congratulations that he has been able to contribute so abundantly to the true greatness of our State and to laying the sure foundation of the system of higher education of our State on such lofty lines as to insure its future growth; and

BE IT RESOLVED FURTHER that we, the representatives of its citizens, express our profound appreciation of this devoted service; wishing for him many more years of the fullest enjoyment of the fruition of a life well spent ; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be inserted in the records of the Journals of the Senate and of the House of Representatives and that a copy be sent to the Honorable Philip Keyes Yonge as evidence of the State's appreciation of his labors, given always with the self-effacing modesty of the patriot.

11. A life-size portrait of Dr. Yonge hangs opposite the entrance. There is one also in the library reading room of the Florida State College for Women. Both were unveiled with ceremony at commencements.

He became a member of the Florida Historical Society on its revival in 1902, was elected vice president in 1924 and was president from November, 1932, through the difficult years of 1933 and 1934, until his death. A result of his deep interest in Florida's history is the collection of Floridiana, the most extensive and valuable in the State, which he and his son Julien C. Yonge brought together when little was being done in Florida towards the preservation of the records of its past.

Dr. Yonge died at his home in Pensacola on August 9, 1934, and was interred in St. Michael's cemetery.