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REMBERT WALLACE PATRICK

by HERBERT J. DOHERTY, JR.

IN THE FALL OF 1940 a young South Carolinian with a brand-new doctor's degree in history from the University of North Carolina appeared among the new faculty members at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Rembert Wallace Patrick had begun his long and warm association with Florida, its people, and its history. In the small, north Florida college town the youthful historian energetically devoted himself to his work and soon won the devoted following of students and the affection and respect of his colleagues. Though he was a practical, down-to-earth man, he quickly revealed a dry, often irreverent sense of humor. Despite his newness to the University of Florida, young Professor Patrick was not an inexperienced teacher. He came to Gainesville from Meredith College in North Carolina where he had taught history while completing his Ph.D. degree. Earlier he had been employed for several years in the public schools of South Carolina.

Born in Columbia, South Carolina, on June 9, 1909, Rembert Patrick was raised in that state and educated in its public schools. Following the remarriage of his widowed mother, however, he moved with his mother to Poughkeepsie, New York, while in high school and graduated there in 1926 from the Oakwood School. Returning south to North Carolina, he enrolled at Guilford College and received his bachelor's degree in 1930. After a brief stint as a stock clerk in New York City where, by his own account, he worked in the "china (not expensive) department of the S. S. Kresge Company, he accepted appointment to the staff of the high school in North, South Carolina. There he taught mathematics and doubled as football coach.¹

The young scholar spent the 1933-1934 academic year in Chapel Hill, winning his master's degree in history from the University of North Carolina. He also won the favor of a Connecticut Yankee, Eleanor Grace Bangs, whom he had met while

1. "Rembert W. Patrick," an autobiographical outline in the files of Department of History, University of Florida. The author is indebted to Mrs. Rembert W. Patrick and Rembert W. Patrick, Jr., for aid and advice in the preparation of this article.

both worked at a summer resort during their undergraduate days, and in December 1933, they were married. Returning in the same year to North High School, he served for two years as its principal. Following the bent of his intellectual interests, however, he resumed his graduate study in Chapel Hill in 1936 and in 1940 earned his Ph.D. degree in American history under the direction of Fletcher M. Green. In the fall of that year, "Pat" and "Egie" with their first-born son, Rembert, Jr., arrived in Gainesville, Florida, counting themselves fortunate that he had received an appointment as assistant professor of social sciences at the University of Florida. Though young Professor Patrick's appointment for the first ten years of his association with the university was in the department of social sciences, he taught history courses as well as the general education social sciences course, a fairly common procedure at the University of Florida. In 1941, the family was enlarged with the arrival of a daughter, Sharon, and in 1943 the younger son, John, was born.

Rembert Patrick showed early promise as a publishing scholar. In 1941 his doctoral dissertation, "Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet," won an award from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and upon its publication in 1944 it received the Bohnenberger Award as that year's best book by a southern-born author. In 1962 it was added to the permanent library of the White House. In Florida, he realized that there was no readily-available state history of reliable quality, and arrangements soon developed for a brief volume, *Florida Under Five Flags*, to be published as the first venture of a new University of Florida Press.² As this work progressed, James Miller Leake, head professor of history and political science, entrusted to Professor Patrick a course in Florida history which Leake had initiated. In the course of his work, the South Carolinian quickly discovered that the resources for research in Florida history were scarce and difficult of access. As a matter of fact, the best collection of materials was a private one assembled by P. K. Yonge, longtime member and chairman of the university system's Board of Control, and his son Julien in Pensacola. As Rembert Patrick pursued this research, he and Julien Yonge became fast friends, and their relationship was an important factor in Mr. Yonge's decision in

2. Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Under Five Flags* (Gainesville, 1945).

1944 to give his valuable collection to the University of Florida and to come with it to Gainesville. In later years Professor Patrick helped add several important collections to the Florida library, including the David Levy Yulee papers and the John B. Stetson collection of reproductions of manuscripts from Spanish archives.

Meanwhile, as he pursued his teaching, research, and writing, Patrick became active in many professional organizations. He was a familiar figure at meetings of the Southern Historical Association and the Florida Historical Society. In 1942 he began a two-year term as secretary-treasurer of the Southern Political Science Association and editor of its publication, *The Journal of Politics*. In 1946 he became a director of the Florida Historical Society, and he was to hold several offices and remain a tireless and influential figure in its activities until shortly before his death. The full extent of his contributions to this society may never be known by its membership, but they were of signal importance at crucial times. Perhaps most important of all his exertions was his unofficial supervision of the society's finances in the late 1940s and early 1950s when, almost monthly, insolvency threatened the organization. Probably more than to any other single person, the society owes its present financial stability to the work of Rembert Patrick. In 1955, upon the retirement of Julien Yonge, he became editor of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, a post he held for seven years.

As he became a more notable and influential figure in Florida historical circles, Patrick also won notice beyond the boundaries of the state. In 1950 he published a compilation of the *Opinions of the Confederate Attorneys General*, followed in 1954 by *Florida Fiasco*, a history of the Georgia-Florida border area in the War of 1812. He was named to important committees of the American Historical Association and the Southern Historical Association, and was a member of the board of editors of *The Journal of Southern History* from 1950 to 1954. He served on the board of directors of the latter organization and became its president in 1942. At home, he was appointed to the Florida State Library Board in 1950 and became its chairman in 1953; in 1953-1954 he was vice-president of the Florida Library Association. In 1956 he was elected as regional vice-

president and to the Council of the American Association for State and Local History; and from 1960 to 1967 he served as vice-president; and in 1967 he was named General Editor and member of the Executive Committee.

As Professor Patrick's professional activities expanded and he became a well-known figure in the field of history, his career at the University of Florida showed comparable progress. He was promoted to associate professor in 1943 and to full professor two years later. In 1950 he was appointed as the first history chairman after that department was separated from political science, and he held that post for five years. In 1959, he was appointed graduate research professor of history. Due in large measure to his influence, this chair was designated as the Julien C. Yonge Research Professorship, to memorialize the signal contributions made by Julien Yonge to the University holdings of Florida history source materials.

In his service to the University of Florida Patrick was generous. He held the chairmanship of the library committee for six years, was chairman of the board of directors of the University of Florida Press for three years, served for ten years on the graduate council, was for twenty-two years faculty associate of the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, and sat as a member on numbers of other committees. As a director of graduate students he was very popular, and under his guidance five students won master of arts degree and nine more the Ph.D. Numbers of others had his advice as a member of their supervisory committees. Never a harsh taskmaster, Dr. Patrick gently but firmly prodded his charges on to the completion of their work. Rarely one to dominate a student's program or to dictate his research, he preferred the student who sought out his guidance and came with his enthusiasm already fired for a specific research project. The Patrick style and philosophy never were superimposed upon a thesis or dissertation. One undiscerning graduate student even evaded being censured for referring to "Rembrandt" Patrick in his preface. That a student could have gotten away with such an error in referring in his narrative to a historical personage was unlikely. Rembert Patrick also felt an obligation to serve his community. He felt keenly the injustices which he saw about him and associated him-

self with movements to end them. As a sincere, devoted Quaker, he gave of his time and effort to the Society of Friends and served as clerk of the Gainesville meeting during the 1950s.

During his long career at the University of Florida, Professor Patrick held several notable visiting appointments at other universities. He was invited to give the Young lectures at Memphis State University in 1958 and the Fleming lectures at Louisiana State University in 1959. He lectured at both Guilford College and Winthrop College in 1960. In the summer of 1956 he was visiting professor at Columbia University, after having spent 1954-1955 at Yale University as a Faculty Fellow of the Ford Foundation. During these years he was also a frequent participant in the meetings of many state and local historical societies and was a contributor to a variety of scholarly conclaves.

To his friends and colleagues he was always known as "Pat." Modesty, graciousness, and kindly, generous consideration were qualities which were most readily observable to those who knew him. Not so immediately apparent was his outrageous sense of humor, which though evident in his lectures, was seen to its best advantage in the long folksy letters which went to those most closely associated with him. One such letter came in response to some spurious Confederate money sent to Pat in "payment" for a book review in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Couching his reply in the form of a letter to himself from a grocer taking him to task for Mrs. Patrick having spent the money for bubble gum, Patrick prefaced the letter with a salutation which was one and one-half typed, single-spaced pages in length and contained in capsule form his life history.³ On another occasion he prepared for *Quarterly* editors a tongue-in-cheek biographical sketch of himself which began, "Young, handsome, brilliant Rembert W. Patrick . . . is Graduate Research Professor of History at the University of Florida," and impishly went on, "It is impossible for those who know Dr. Patrick only by his writing to conceive of anything being superior to his written words, but thousands of students testify that he is even greater as a teacher than as an author. In 1962 he was forced to relinquish his Florida History course (students overtaxed the physical space of lecture halls at the University)."⁴

3. "I. B. Potted" to Rembert W. Patrick, in possession of Samuel Proctor, Gainesville, Florida.

4. Mss. in possession of Samuel Proctor.

Underneath the gentle, self-effacing exterior which most people saw, Rembert Patrick was a man of generous, liberal principles and definite political convictions. Though he took care to remain academically detached, always tried to remain open-minded and friendly toward all, and sought not to let his political beliefs damage his effectiveness in the organizations he served, his dedication to the right as he saw it ultimately had to prevail. Long before it was popular to do so, he gave his support to the NAACP and the principle of equal justice for all. This brought condemnation, which Patrick treated lightly, from White Citizens' Councils and racial supremacy groups. When he approached this author in 1959 to propose succeeding him to the editorship of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, one of the reasons given was that he might become "a controversial figure" who could harm the Florida Historical Society, which sponsored the publication, by his association with it.⁵ In the previous year he had published *Race Relations in the South*, a pamphlet which developed from a faculty lecture at the University of Florida and from a talk made before the Negro Florida State Teachers' Association at Miami on April 25, 1958. Patrick viewed this as one of his most important writings, but it resulted in his being subjected to violent abuse from racial supremacists who plagued him with anonymous phone calls, hate literature, and threats that crosses would be burned on his lawn.

As the years passed and the civil rights movement grew in momentum, Patrick's public endorsement of it became more prominent. When the symbolic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, was proposed in March of 1965, he felt that he must be there, and he accepted an invitation to join some forty prominent American historians—the foremost men in their field—who were organizing to join the procession. With one Florida colleague, he joined the marchers in the suburbs on March 25 and walked into Montgomery to stand before the old Confederate capitol which had figured so prominently in much of his own researches and writings. For him the march was quiet and uneventful, but as he walked he reflected with his fellow historians upon the dangers of losing one's perspective and detachment by being an activist in any cause. Nonetheless his Quaker

5. Patrick to H. J. Doherty, October 27, 1959, in possession of H. J. Doherty, Jr., Gainesville, Florida.

conscience must have been quickened by the interminable procession of singing blacks and whites moving twelve abreast through the broad avenues of the old capital city. As the crowds began to disperse and the dust to settle back over Montgomery, Rembert Patrick drove back to Jacksonville to keep a speaking engagement before the United Daughters of the Confederacy.⁶

Shortly after this civil rights march, Patrick took part in a symposium of historians and social scientists at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. There he was critical of the obsolete and extreme concepts of "state sovereignty" which were being advanced by some southern politicians in defense of segregation. A right-wing television station in North Carolina took note of the event and excoriated its participants. Seizing upon a rarely-used dictionary definition of a symposium as "a drinking party," it implied that the speakers must all have been intoxicated to have been capable of such views as Patrick expressed. Though normally a man who did not respond to personal criticism, Patrick was stung to reply. His letter began on a humorous note, but his indignation grew as the reply lengthened. He lectured the station manager on constitutional law, proclaimed his devotion to his country, pointed out that his grandfather had lost a leg "fighting for the misguided South," and ended with this peroration: ". . . if, because I want equality under law for all of our citizens, am opposed to most of Goldwater's political and economic and social philosophies, wish to keep free enterprise vital and a heritage for my three children instead of seeing it destroyed by 'kooks,' wish to give Negroes opportunities for bettering their condition in life-if for these reasons, you accuse me of being a left-winger, or later join others who pretend to think me a communist but dare not make the false charge in speech or writing, I then proudly wear the badge of drunkard, drunken speaker, and left-winger, and so forth."⁷

Though he was actively involved in liberal causes, Patrick's scholarly productivity continued until the end of his life. He and collaborating authors produced two elementary school text books, one in 1957 on Florida, the other in 1961 on the United

6. The author is indebted to Professor Selden Henry of the University of Florida for sharing his memories of the Montgomery episode.

7. Patrick to Jesse Helms, May 30, 1964, Patrick papers, University Collection, University of Florida Library.

States. His wife Eleanor was a co-author of the fourth-grade Florida history text. In 1960 *The Fall of Richmond* appeared and won for him the merit award of the American Association for State and Local History. In 1962 the University of Florida Press began an ambitious project to republish facsimile editions of rare books on Florida. Patrick became the general editor of the *Floridiana Facsimile & Reprint Series* and, as it developed, wrote introductions for three of these works. In 1963 he authored a biography, *Aristocrat in Uniform: General Duncan L. Clinch*, and directed that the Florida Historical Society would receive all royalties. Though his scholarly reputation rested upon serious, historical writings, like many scholars Pat dreamed of becoming a successful novelist. Among his papers at the University of Florida are manuscripts of an unpublished novel and two short stories. The novel was written during one of his summers spent in the repose of his wife's New England home country. After completing the work which he had pursued with single-minded dedication, he read it over and pronounced it terrible. He relegated it to oblivion after penciling upon its title page, "The only novel ever written by RWP thank goodness."⁸ It was in the last decade of his life that Rembert Patrick completed the most significant part of his research and writing—always done with the sympathy, support, and assistance of his wife. Published only a short time before his death, his *The Reconstruction of the Nation* was hailed as his best book. Writing in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* Professor Howard Quint of the University of Massachusetts praised Patrick's sound scholarship and concluded, "It is the best history of Reconstruction yet to be written."⁹ Professor David Donald stated that "Professor Patrick's book is virtually certain of acceptance as the standard account of the Reconstruction era for this generation."¹⁰

At the middle of the seventh decade of the twentieth century, Rembert Patrick was approaching the end of his twenty-sixth year at the University of Florida—years which had been busy, full, productive, and mutually beneficial for the historian and

8. Mss. in Patrick papers.

9. Howard H. Quint, review of Rembert W. Patrick, *The Reconstruction of the Nation* (New York, 1967), *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLVI (January 1968), 285-88.

10. *Commentary*, XLIV (September 1967), 96.

his adopted state. Having passed the age of fifty-five, he was eligible for retirement when the University of Georgia invited him to join its faculty. Though he confided it only to his family and a few intimate friends, he had become increasingly discouraged by the educational and political climate in Florida, and the Georgia offer came at precisely the right time. He and Eleanor, "with emotion and regret," decided to accept the proposal - a larger salary, increased fringe benefits, "and more aid in research."¹¹ At the end of June 1966, the Patricks ended their long residence in Florida and moved to Athens where Pat became Graduate Research Professor of History. The associations there were pleasant and the opportunities for historical research were, for a southern state university, almost without parallel. Though their children remained in Florida, the Patricks entered upon a full and happy life in their new home.

In November of 1967 the meeting of the Southern Historical Association was held in Atlanta and, as a former president, Pat was present and obviously derived much satisfaction from association with his life-long friends in the historical profession. He dined with old friends from Gainesville, and eagerly sought news of his former colleagues at the University of Florida. Though he felt an indisposition which he did not confess at the time, he spoke at the Friday luncheon of the Phi Alpha Theta history honorary and participated actively in all of the events of the weekend. Upon his return to Athens, he began to suffer pains which grew so severe that he was hospitalized. Suddenly, on the evening of November 16, 1967, the news came to his shocked family and friends that Rembert Patrick had died of a heart attack.

On Sunday, December 3, the Society of Friends held a memorial service in Gainesville in his memory. There, his family, colleagues, admirers, and students in large numbers came together for reflection and meditation.

11. Patrick to John K. Mahon, December 17, 1965, in Department of History files, University of Florida.