

WILSON'S HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Wilson County Historical Association

Volume 11, Number 2

Fall 2022

FROM SIMMS SIDING TO SIMS: A TRAIN STOP IN NORTHWESTERN OLD FIELDS TOWNSHIP

James A. Bailey and Margaret B. Bailey

NORFOLK & SOUTHERN RY.		
Fitzgerald, Wolcott & Kerr, Receivers.		
SPEND LABOR DAY		
IN		
The Capital of the Old North State		
Raleigh, N. C.		
Attractive Low Round-Trip Fares From the Following Stations:		
From	Raleigh Division.	Fares
Washington, N. C.	\$2.50
Chocowinity, N. C.	2.50
Bryan, N. C.	2.50
Grimesland, N. C.	2.50
Simpson, N. C.	2.40
Greenville, N. C.	2.25
Arthur, N. C.	2.25
Farmville, N. C.	2.00
Walstonburg, N. C.	1.85
Stantonsburg, N. C.	1.60
Evansdale, N. C.	1.50
Wilson, N. C.	1.25
Simms Siding, N. C.	1.25
Neverson, N. C.	1.25
Bailey, N. C.	1.25
Middlesex, N. C.	1.25
Zebulon, N. C.	1.00
Wendell, N. C.	1.00
Eagle Rock, N. C.70
Knightdale, N. C.55
Boushall, N. C.40
Edgeton, N. C.	20

1908 Train Schedule

NC Christian Advocate (Greensboro, NC) · 3 Sep 1908, p 15

named stops were needed for identifying the exact location of the train for safety and for determining train schedules.

Passenger trains travelled through Simms Siding and in 1908, the fare was \$1.25 for passengers traveling from Simms Siding to Raleigh. Norfolk-Southern Railroad also had a telegraph office at Simms Siding but did not have a depot. It is unknown whether passenger trains had a routine stop at Simms Siding or if it was a signaled stop. At Neverson, a signaled

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A Message from the Association President



Perry Morrison, President

The chill in the air this morning told me fall has arrived, finally! It's been a long hot summer, the remnants of Hurricane Ian have restored our water table to normal limits, and I am looking forward to seeing some fall colors in the trees very shortly.

While you've been away this summer, the business of the WCHA has continued moving forward. We've had some applications for N.C. Civil Rights markers pending, and once we hear about those we plan to erect two more WCHA markers. Many special thanks to the Wilson County Tourism Development Authority for their grant funding.

One sad development is that Barton College has advised that they will no longer be having their annual fall lecture in history, which for many, many years has served as our fall meeting. Nevertheless, we have booked the Assembly Room at the Wilson County Public Library for Thursday, November 10, 2022 at 5:30 PM to hold our fall meeting. Margaret and Jim Bailey have graciously accepted our invitation to present a program on the history of the Town of Sims, which you will also read about in this newsletter.

I have one sad note to share. Sheila Little, who served for many years as our secretary, has recently passed away. We will certainly miss Sheila, who quietly went about recording the business of our association and unflinchingly had a smile on her face. We offer her family our deepest sympathies and wish them the very best. This will be good time to convene a Nominating Committee to work on a new slate of officers to stand for election at our annual meeting in May.

I look forward to seeing everyone on November 10!

train stop approximately one mile west of Simms Siding, a passenger could signal the conductor by waving a white handkerchief as the train approached. The train would stop and the passenger would board.²

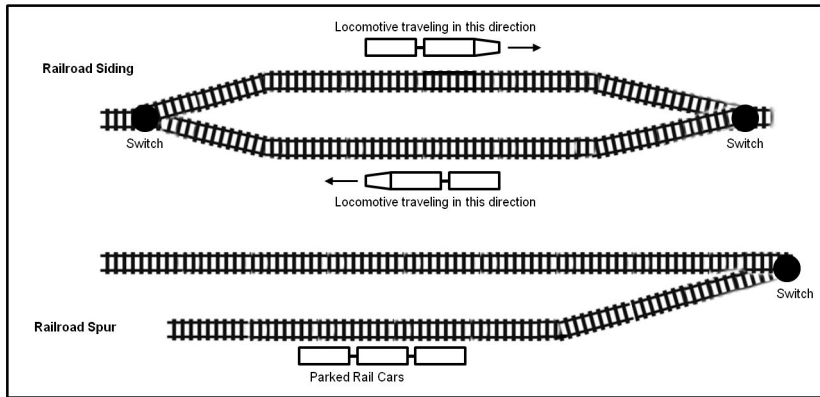


Diagram of a Railway Siding and Spur.

Early in the history of the town east of Neverson, the train stop at that location was identified as Simms Siding. However, Simms Siding, did not originate from the term “siding” as generally used in railroad terminology. A railway siding was designated as a low-speed section of track diverging from the mainline which allowed two trains travelling in opposite directions to pass.

However, Simms Siding did not have a siding laid for passing trains. A 1955 newspaper article described Simms Siding as having had

a spur; and concluded it was named “Simms Siding” because of the spur. Conversely, the 1909 plat for the town, did not show evidence that Norfolk-Southern Railroad laid tracks for a spur or a siding at Simms Siding.³

The origin of the name for the Town of Sims may be attributed to W. W. Simms Company. Simms, originally a Stantonsburg farmer, purchased five acres of land in Wilson County in 1898 to establish a lumber company.⁴ William Wiley “Billie” Simms constructed a building to operate a saw mill, planing mill, drying kilns and a variety of other wood-working machines.⁵ A year later, in 1899, the W. W. Simms Lumber Company was incorporated by the North Carolina General Assembly with \$25,000 in capital stock.⁶

One of W. W. Simms Company’s lumber mills was located in northwestern Wilson County on the Norfolk-Southern Railway. Trains stopped at the location to load wood products made at W. W. Simms’ mill. One of the products was siding for houses. Therefore, “Simms Siding” became readily recognized as the train stop for the western Wilson County Norfolk-Southern Railway.

Prior to the Simms Siding train stop, Mark Peel’s home was designated as a US postal stop, and Peel was appointed as the first postmaster for the Simms Siding area on June 19, 1908, and served until September 6, 1909. Following Peel as postmaster was his daughter, Veanie Peel, who served two terms from September 7, 1909 – March 31, 1910 and April 30, 1910 - May 15, 1912. During Veanie Peel’s first term as postmistress, she married Dr. William T. Sanders.⁷ Then, on May 16, 1912, Mark Peel’s son, Christopher Columbus Peel, was appointed postmaster and served until September 12, 1919. Therefore, when the town was incorporated as “Simms” in 1913, Christopher C. Peel was officially Simms’ first postmaster. Jennie R. Flowers replaced Christopher C. Peel when she was appointed postmistress September 13, 1919. Flowers held the position when the town was incorporated as Sims in 1923 and served until May 14, 1928.⁸⁻¹⁰ As the town developed, the post office was no longer located in the postmasters’ homes, the post office was located in a corner of Eddie Nichols’ grocery store on Main Street. The grocery store building was later a furniture store operated by Osborne Keith Howell, a former Wilson County constable and deputy.¹¹

THE W. W. SIMMS COMPANY, Inc.
 WILSON, N. C.
 MANUFACTURERS
Rough and Dressed Lumber of All Kinds
Sash, Doors, Blinds and General Mill Work
 CABINET WORK A SPECIALTY
Estimates Cheerfully Furnished
Phones 51 and 750

W. W. Simms Advertisement.
 (Hill Directory Co.’s Wilson, N. C. City Directory 1922-23)

In 1909, Simms Siding was an unincorporated town; however, in 1913, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted a Bill which incorporated the town as “Simms” but the term, “Siding,” was omitted from the name in

the legislation. Also, in the 1913 legislation, D. R. Weaver was appointed as Sims' first mayor.¹² Additionally, the legislation appointed the town's first town commissioners: J. M. Burnett, Joseph S. Bailey and Nathan Peele.¹³ Then, in 1923, the General Assembly ratified a bill which incorporated the town and changed the spelling from "Simms" to "Sims." The General Assembly appointed three Sims commissioners in the 1923 legislation, two of which, J. M. Burnett and J. S. Bailey, had been appointed in the 1913 legislation. In the 1923 legislation, Eddie Nichols replaced Nathan Peele as town commissioner. Also, the 1923 legislation directed the three commissioners to elect a mayor, so they elected J. L. Hinnant as mayor.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ However, in a 1962 newspaper article, the mayor in 1923 was reported as W. H. Jones who served as mayor until 1931. The article also listed the 1923 town commissioners as: J. W. Burnett, J. S. Bailey and A. T. Byrd. Although, the town's official name became "Sims" when the 1923 legislation was enacted, the town's name continued to appear in some publications as Simms and Simms Siding.¹⁷

People continued to settle the Sims community, and by the 1923-1924 school year, Sims School, a few miles south of the town had two hundred and thirty-two students enrolled in grades one through six. The Sims School faculty included: Bessie Freeman, Annie Frazier, Gladys Phillips, Mary Wilkerson, Agnes Credle and Myrtie E. Morse.¹⁸

An important employer for residents of Sims as well as others in the community was Neverson Quarry. On July 6, 1916, some officials at the Neverson quarry and Norfolk Southern Railroad were alarmed by an incident that excited some witnesses in Simms. While an engineer was on the ground oiling movable joints of Engine No. 98, the engine suddenly took off traveling east with no one onboard. The engine passed through the switch at Neverson and was heading east on the main track around 8 o'clock in the morning. The runaway locomotive passed through Simms traveling about forty miles per hour, but the runaway locomotive soon crashed. Luckily no one was injured in the incident. The locomotive was used around the quarry and this was the first and only incidence of this ever happening.¹⁹

In 1930, there was a major fire in Sims which burned Burnett's Supply Company located on Highway 91 [Hwy. 264]. The large supply store nearly covered an entire town block and was a popular meeting place for local farmers. At the time, Sims did not have a fire department but had an agreement with the Town of Bailey to render fire services. The Bailey Fire Department and citizens of Sims fought the blaze side by side, but despite their efforts the Burnett's Supply Company was destroyed.²⁰

An assortment of businesses and services were established in the Town of Sims over the years. A new drug store opened in 1948. On June 18, 1948, the Sims Drug Store had its grand opening and children received free ice cream from 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm. The new building was constructed by Davis and Mercer, general contractors. Other businesses in the town at the time were: Dell's Beauty Shop; Albert Nichols' Store and J. T. Boykin's Store, both general merchants; Williamson's Esso Station; Lucas Grocery Store; J. F. Nichols Grocery; and L. O. Wilson's Electrical Appliance Dealer. Proprietors C. S. Nichols operated a drycleaning business; Willie Walker operated the Sims Barber Shop; and Guy Stott operated a coal yard. Bill and Jay Peele operated "Peele's Honky-Tonk," a place for entertainment, refreshments and smokes.²¹

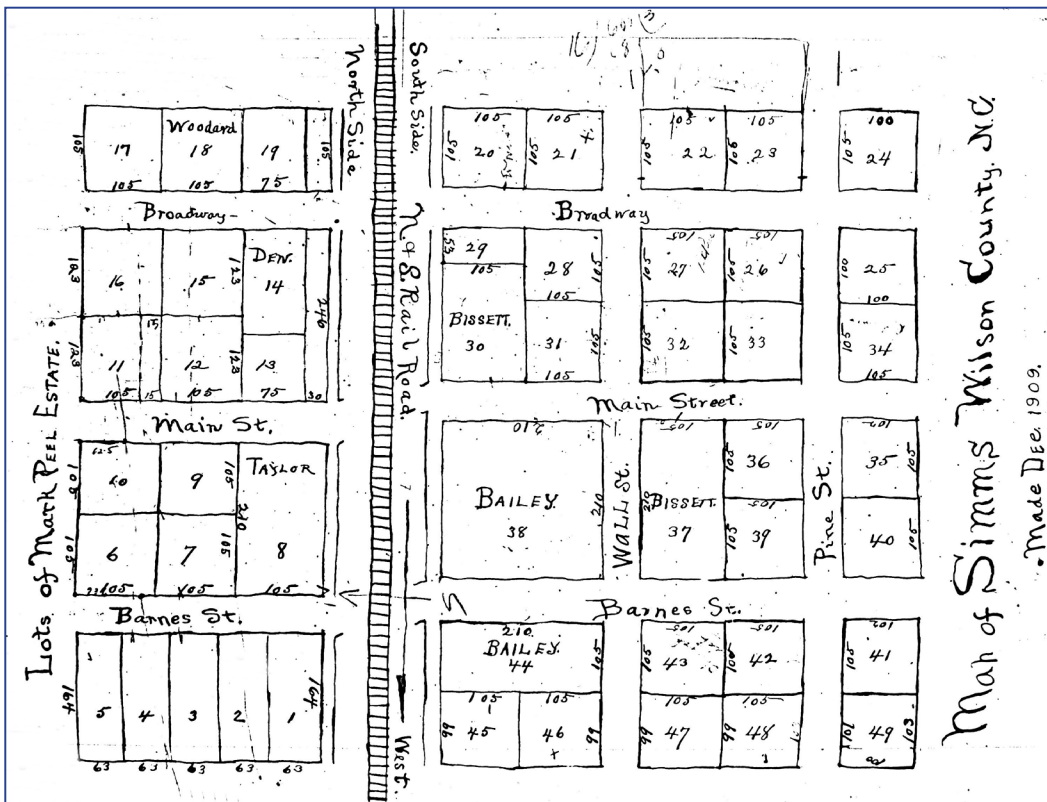


Sims Drug Store Interior
(Wilson Daily Times, Wilson, NC June 17, 1948, 8.)

Below are some additional events, business, political and cultural, which were relevant to the Town of Sims:

- **September 9, 1886** - W. W. Simms married Pauline Blount and in the 1890s, they moved to Wilson. In the early 1900s W. W. Simms purchased the Victorian style cottage located at 307 West Green Street in Wilson. It was built about 1881 by John A. Weaver, a prominent Wilson hardware merchant. Today, it is referred to as the Weaver-Simms house.²²

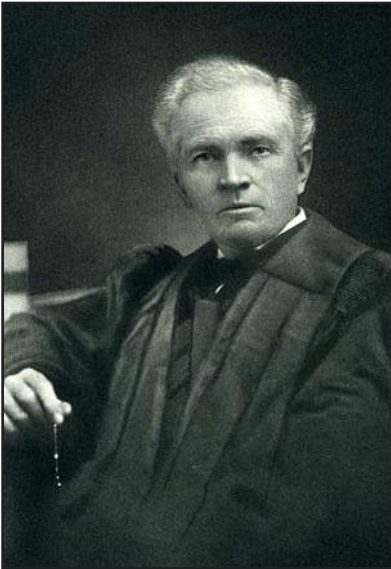
- **January 4, 1910** - Postmistress Veanie Peel married Dr. W. T. Sanders. He was born in Georgia in 1863 and by 1909, had settled in Nash County. In 1911, despite being blind, he had established a medical practice in the Whitehead Building, Nash Street, Wilson. Dr. Sanders also had a medical practice in Nash County in the Horne's Church Community. Dr. W. T. Sanders died in 1913.²³⁻²⁴ January 19, 1916, Free Will Baptist minister, Reverend J. K. Ruffin, officiated at Veanie Peel Sanders and G. V. Narron's marriage. Three Simms residents, D. W. Winborne, D. K. Peele and Rosa Peele, witnessed G. V. and Veanie Narron's marriage.²⁵
- **1921** - W. W. Simms retired from the lumber business and sold the company. The new owners were R. G. Briggs, President; W. T. Condon, Vice President; and L. P. McFarland, Secretary.²⁶
- **c. 1924** - Nichols Drug Store and soda fountain were popular gathering places for the folks in Sims. Dr. Thomas Gavin Bradshaw from Rock Ridge had an office in the back of Aaron Nichols' Drug Store on Main Street. Dr. Bradshaw had office hours every afternoon and treated area patients. Bobby Ruffin, a current Sims resident, operated a video rental store in the same building in the 1990s.²⁷⁻²⁸
- **April 4, 1929** - E. R. Allen sold his two-story brick store on highway 91 [Hwy. 264] in Sims. The store was 36 by 90 feet with five rooms downstairs and four rooms upstairs. There were two gas pumps in front of the store. Value of the store, stock and fixtures was \$11,000.²⁹
- **February 11, 1932** - Sixty-six-year-old W. W. Simms died after several months of illness from kidney disease at his home in Wilson. His first wife, Pauline Blount, the daughter of George W. Blount, preceded Simms in death on October 3, 1913. He remarried Ruby Vinson from Littleton on April 7, 1920. At his death he was survived by his second wife and two sons, George and Phillip. He was interred at Maplewood Cemetery.³⁰
- **1939** - J. S. Bailey was unopposed for mayor. J. F. Nichols, Howard Williamson and Ed Nichols also were re-elected as commissioners with no opposition.³¹
- **1944** - C. L. Smith purchased Nichols Drug Company.³²
- **1947** - Thomas Glenn "T. G." Bailey was reelected as Mayor and Albert Nichols, Jesse Bunn and J. F. Nichols were elected as town commissioners.³³
- **1949** - The Lions Club was formed and the principal of Sims School, A. O. Folk, was elected as the club's first president.³⁴
- **March 1953** - The North Carolina General Assembly increased the number of commissioners in Sims from three to five.³⁵



Highway 264 Alternate and Main Street form the Town of Sims' business district. The railroad tracks traverse the town. Today, the original Sims Elementary School which was a part of Sims' early landscape south of town was demolished several years ago. Sims' population was one-hundred and twenty-two in 1930, one-hundred and seventy-three in 1940, and two-hundred and seven in 1950. When the most recent census data was released, the population of Sims was three hundred and twenty-one.

References for Simms Siding to Sims Article

1. "Shooting at Middlesex," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 15 April 1909, 4.
2. "Norfolk-Southern," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* (Greensboro, NC) 3 September 1908, 15.
3. "Sims Youngest Town in County: Was Given Charter in 1923," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 6 May 1955, 49.
4. Stephen Werk, "How Simms Got Its Name: Six Wilson Structures, Grounds Join List of Historic Properties," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 5 February 2017, 13.
5. "Simms and Company's New Mill," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC) 16 June 1898, 3.
6. "Messenger Bureau," *The Wilmington Messenger* (Wilmington, NC) 7 January 1899, 1.
7. William T. Sanders and Vinia Peele's Marriage License, Wilson County Register of Deeds, Wilson, NC, 21 December 1909.
8. Hugh Johnston, "Looking Backward: County Post Offices," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 13 February 1951, 6.
9. Authors' Note: Hugh Johnston was a local researcher. Many of Johnston's articles do not contain sources. Consequently, it is difficult to document his research.
10. National Archives, Washington, DC; Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-Sept. 30, 1971, Records of the Post Office Department, Group Number: 28; Series: M841; Roll No. 95.
11. Rosellen McCrory, "Over 50-Year Period, Even Small Towns Change a Lot," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 25 August 1990, 3.
12. Authors Note: Mayor D. R. Weaver's name may have been a typographical error. Perhaps the mayor's middle initial should have been "B" instead of "R." The mayor could have been Dempsey Bunion Weaver, who was a farmer and owner of property near Simms on the Norfolk-Southern Railroad in 1915. Also, Dempsey Bunion Weaver, Simms, NC, completed and filed a registration card in 1918 prior to WWI. Weaver's date of birth was recorded August 15, 1875, and his wife's name was Elizabeth "Lizzie" Williford Weaver.
13. "An Act to Incorporate the Town of Simms, Wilson County, North Carolina" NC General Statute (1913, c. 293-294, s. 1-7) 5 March 1913.
14. "An Act to Incorporate the Town of Sims, Wilson County, North Carolina" NC General Statute (1923, c. 58, s. 1-5) 17 February 1923.
15. "Town of Sims Owes No Debts and Is Busy Rural Community," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 20 August 1943, 26.
16. "One of Sims' Oldest Residents Traces the Town's Development," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 17 August 1962, 18.
17. "Sims Youngest Town in County."
18. The Public Schools of Wilson County North Carolina (Wilson: Board of Education, 1942) 67, 97.
19. "Norfolk Southern Engine on Vacation," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 9 July 1916, 2.
20. "Sims Youngest Town in County."
21. Ibid.
22. Susan McDonald, *History of Wilson County and Its Families* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co, Dallas, 1985) 358.
23. M. W. Weaver, "Iron from Horne's Community Aided the Confederate Cause," *The Nashville Graphic* (Nashville, NC) 8 April 1975, 10.
24. "Sanders-Peele: Blind Doctor of 46, to Marry Postmistress Who Is Only 26 Years Old," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 24 December 1909, 6.
25. G. V. Narron and Vinia Peel Sanders, Marriage License, Wilson County Register of Deeds, Wilson, NC, 18 January 1916.
26. "The W.W. Simms Company," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 29 July 1921, 27.
27. McCrory.
28. "Death Claims Wilson Doctor," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 12 April 1955, 21.
29. "Business Opportunities," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 17 April 1929, 17.
30. "Billie Simms Dies at His Home in Wilson," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 12 February 1932, 5.
31. "Sims Town Officials Unopposed for Posts," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 5 April 1939, 8.
32. "Special Notice," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 4 December 1944, 7.
33. "Sims Election," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) 8 May 1947, 20.
34. "Sims Youngest Town in County."
35. "Increase Sought in Board at Sims," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC) 9 March 1953, 1.



Judge Frank A. Daniel's address
3rd installment of edited (newsletter)
H.G. Connor Eulogy:
Previous Installments in the Spring 2021 and Spring-Summer 2021 Newsletters

. . . And he married, November 20, 1871, in his twentieth year, Kate Whitfield, born in Tarboro, July 3, 1853, the eldest daughter of the other partner, George Whitfield, an able and learned lawyer and a member of one of the oldest and most prominent families of the South – a congenial and happy union which blessed his life for more than half a century, until the death of the faithful partaker of his joys and sorrows, January 30, 1924. There were born of the marriage twelve children: George Whitfield, Mary Groves McNair, Henry Groves, Jr., Robert D. W., Kate Bronson Murray, Elizabeth B., David M., Louise Woodard, Louise M., and John Bruce, all of whom survived him, except Elizabeth B., Louise B., and John Bruce, who died in infancy. He lived to see their eldest son, George Whitfield, enjoy a successful career at the Bar, and served with distinction as legislator, Judge of the Superior Court, and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court; their second son, Henry Groves, Jr., attained high position and reputation as a lawyer and law-maker; Robert D. W., Professor of History and Government in the University of North Carolina, become one of our leading historians, and their other sons and daughters illustrate to the private walks of life the abilities and virtues of their past.

U.S. District Court Judge H.G. Connor

While with Howard & Whitfield he had been unable to pursue the study of law continuously and systematically; and, after their connection ceased, had continued his reading, but became convinced that he needed direction and guidance in this further pursuit. Fortunately, about the time he reached this conclusion, he was invited by Hon. William T. Dortch, one of the great lawyers of that day who, while attending the Courts of Wilson, had been attracted to him, to go to his home in Goldsboro and continue his studies. Accepting this highly appreciated invitation, he lived for some months with Mr. Dortch, completed his preparation for the bar and formed a friendship which continued undimmed until the death of his able preceptor. In an address, delivered in 1916, Judge Connor, in describing Mr. Dortch, unconsciously described himself when he declared:

It is moral courage . . . which gives dignity to his character and commands the respect of all good men, which makes them afraid to do wrong and unafraid to do right, which marks a manly man – a gentleman.”

I never think of Judge Connor's language on this occasion and of his life without recalling Thackeray's definition:

What is it to be a gentleman? Is it to have lofty aims, to lead a pure life, to keep your honor virgin, to have the esteem of your fellow citizens, and the love of your fireside; to bear good fortune meekly; to suffer evil with constancy; and through evil or good to maintain truth always?

Show me the happy man whose life exhibits these qualities, and him we will salute as gentlemen whatever his rank may be.

Editor's Note: Like many prominent North Carolina leaders of his day, H.G. Connor was a "White Supremacist." He was elected to the N.C. House from Wilson County during the tumultuous year 1898 and became its Speaker that same year. An official state report on the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898 states that Connor's correspondence and speeches indicated that he desired to remove the negro from the politics of North Carolina, yet also that it was his belief that those in control of political power "should earnestly improve the lives and education of blacks." (Carolana.com, a blog of J.D. Lewis)

***WCHA FALL MEETING
THURSDAY, NOV. 10, 5:30 PM
WILSON CO. PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASSEMBLY ROOM***

Wilson County Historical Association
P.O. Box 2046
Wilson, NC 27894-2046

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