

Columbia and Richland County

A SOUTH CAROLINA
COMMUNITY, 1740-1990

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3. The dispensary, a state-operated liquor monopoly instituted in the 1890s and often a hot political issue, gradually evolved into a county-option plan. By 1915, only fifteen counties, among them, Richland and Lexington, had dispensaries.
4. Not everyone was swept away by patriotic ardor. Before war was declared, Civil War veteran W. M. Reedy of Clio cautioned his sons not to volunteer: "It's a hard life, in fact, it's a dog's life." Six months later, while reading the *State*, he discovered that not one but two of his boys were in uniform at Camp Jackson. Furious, Dr. Reedy wrote demanding an immediate explanation (Reedy-Beacham Papers).
5. Police stopped two cars at the Lexington end of the Congaree River Bridge in October of 1922 and seized 400 quarts of whiskey. Eight months later, they uncovered a twenty-five-gallon tank of booze in the wall of a Gervais Street cafe.
6. *State*, 21 January 1921. In the mid-twenties, Mimnaugh's Department Store was selling aluminum auto signs: "Columbia—The City Unlimited."
7. The decision to build at Dreyfuss Field, once known as Fisher's Mill Pond Bottom, was preceded by heated debate when Mayor Owens tried to erect a stadium in Maxey Gregg Park instead. Only after the state Supreme Court ruled against him in January of 1927 did Owens turn reluctantly to the South Assembly Street site now used by the Columbia Mets. *Note*: This field was named for Barney Dreyfuss, head of the Pittsburgh Pirates, the club then guiding the fortunes of the Columbia Coners.
8. New York industrialist William Barstow, the man behind Lake Murray, purchased the utility interests of Edwin Robertson in 1925. At that time, he wisely concluded an agreement with the state concerning the irksome Columbia Canal. In return for relieving him of any obligation to complete that waterway, Barstow agreed to supply the state with a specified amount of free electricity—some of which later lit up the Congaree Street Bridge.
9. At this time, the city tried once more to annex Eau Claire, but the vote subsequently was ruled invalid. Also, in 1928 the Richland County delegation split over renaming the "old" road to Camden. Senator James H. Hammond, who prevailed, wanted to call it Forest Drive, while House members favored "road," maintaining that "drive" meant only a short distance and was an improper designation for a major artery.
10. Paul Stroman Lofton, Jr., "A Social and Economic History of Columbia, South Carolina, During the Great Depression, 1929–1940," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1977, p. vi. *Note*: Much of the material that follows comes from this research.
11. Work was supposed to begin in May of 1930 on yet another large hotel, a new version of the old Jerome at Main and Lady streets, but that structure never appeared.
12. The business community mounted still another campaign in 1931. Stung by words Sinclair Lewis wrote in 1920, merchants tried to change the name of Main Street to "State Street." They formed committees, held meetings, wrote letters, and took polls, but, in the end, nothing happened.
13. According to census returns, there were 2,787 farms in 1930 and 3,200 in 1935, reflecting an obvious population shift in the depths of the Depression. During the 1930s, the number of tenant holdings declined slightly (1,536 to 1,212), and the value of land and buildings also dropped (\$7.9 to \$6.9 million), as did the number of mules and horses, down from 3,642 to 2,890. Herds of cattle increased somewhat, but corn and cotton production remained virtually unchanged.

William E. Gonzales's Columbia

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



The youngest of three brothers who guided the fortunes of the *State* for nearly half a century, William Elliott Gonzales (1866–1937) was the son of a foot-loose, impecunious Cuban revolutionary, Ambrosio José Gonzales, and Harriett Rut-

ledge Elliott, daughter of lowcountry grandee William Elliott. In fourteen years, this unlikely pair produced six children. William, originally christened "Benigno," was fifth in line and the first born after the Civil War. His father, a veteran of that conflict, was a man who changed jobs and abodes with alarming frequency, and in January 1869 the family departed for Cuba where Gonzales achieved fleeting stability as a teacher. However, ten months later his wife fell victim to yellow fever, and within two years widower Gonzales deposited his brood with a collection of equally impecunious Elliott aunts and uncles living at "Oak Lawn" in Colleton County. He then drifted on to New York, Baltimore, and other points.

Although Gonzales reappeared from time to time and made some effort to be helpful, relations with his in-laws and progeny quickly deteriorated. By the late 1870s, his eldest son (Ambrose) refused to see him, and the Elliotts were delighted when Gonzales once more departed for Cuba. Then, in 1882, \$10,000 inherited from an elderly aunt produced a distinct warming trend, especially when this new wealth paid back taxes on "Oak Lawn" and erected a more suitable dwelling for the Elliott-Gonzales household. Even Ambrose was willing to accept a \$2,000 loan in order to educate his youngest sister, Harriett. But William, a student at the Citadel, declined to see his father and spurned financial assistance.

As Lewis Jones relates in *Stormy Petrel: N. G. Gonzales and His State* (1973), during the 1870s all of these youngsters received training in educational fundamentals from their aunts; and, as remarkable as it may seem, these ladies somehow managed to send the two oldest boys to

struggling Virginia preparatory schools for a year or so. They then became telegraph operators on rail lines in the southernmost part of the state, jobs that eventually led to careers in journalism.

By the early 1880s, N. G. (Narcisco Gener), a reporter for the *Charleston News and Courier*, was able to send William to King's Mountain Military Academy in Yorkville and the Citadel. Although William liked cadet life, he was embarrassed by a tendency to stutter; and, with Narcisco's permission, left that Charleston institution in the spring of his freshman year. A short time later, he joined the *News and Courier's* Columbia bureau as a five-dollar-a-week assistant to his brother. The following year (1885), Ambrose, who had been working in New York City, became associated with the business department of the same daily, spending much of his time traveling about the state writing descriptive articles calculated to boost circulation. Unwittingly, perhaps, the foundations were being laid for a rival newspaper a few years hence.

In February of 1887, William took as his bride a striking Columbia belle, Sara Shiver, daughter of a well-to-do businessman. Although the Elliott aunts were not enthusiastic, the wedding was all one could ask for: twenty-six attendants, a vast throng at Columbia's First Presbyterian Church that included Governor John P. Richardson and the Richland Volunteers in full splendor, and a brilliant reception at the Shiver home on Arsenal Hill.¹ Within six months, William vainly sought a raise, noting it was difficult to live in a "respectable manner" in Columbia on twelve dollars and fifty cents a week. Soon after this appeal, those operating the *News and Courier*, in a cost-cutting move, decided to dispense with his services entirely. However, this young man soon was named private secretary to Governor Richardson.

Late in the following year (1889), Ambrose quit the paper to become secretary of the State Board of Agriculture. The year after that, Benjamin Ryan Tillman—the principal target of the soon-to-be-born *State*—swept to victory, stirring Narcisco, Ambrose, and their friends to mount a holy war against this agricultural reformer. But William, having gone to North Carolina to promote a resort near Asheville, was not party to these exciting proceedings, a fact he always regretted. Within two years, however, the real-estate scheme soured, and William (then "W. Elliott Gonzales") was back in South Carolina working for the *State*.

In the beginning, it was touch and go. Money was tight, the three brothers were pitted against well-entrenched rivals such as the *Columbia Register* and the *News and Courier*, and only dogged determination (especially that of Ambrose) kept the *State* alive. He was, in fact, "the bal-

ance wheel" of this trio—a good-natured, public-spirited compromiser, and a man often too generous with money. Forced to play the father role at a young age, contemporaries thought him the real power during the *State's* formative years. Yet, as time revealed, Ambrose did not really have a head for business, which may explain why he insisted on keeping the paper going when others, even Narcisco, thought it doomed.

By contrast, Narcisco Gener Gonzales, perhaps because he had weak eyes and was short-sighted, was a reserved, dignified appearing introvert. An aggressive editor, he often demonstrated the same "bad-tempered" demeanor that brother Ambrose commented upon when they were young. Writing in *Stormy Petrel*, Lewis Jones details a long list of scrapes and clashes in which Narcisco was involved. The cause, he notes, usually was right, but "his language rarely was restrained."

William, in the opinion of Jones, had "the most pleasing personality," although until Narcisco's death he clearly was a junior partner. An avid wheelman, William suffered a bad spill during a five-mile bicycle race at the fair grounds in June of 1894, which, according to the *State*, would force him "to lay up for some time." Two years later, this feature writer-reporter produced an amazing, eleven-part series on "The New Columbia" (3 June-13 July 1896), a penetrating analysis of the growth and development of South Carolina's capital city since 1880.²

Each of the brothers participated in the Cuban conflict of the late 1890s, and Narcisco told of his experiences in the columns of the *State* (8 September-7 December 1898), reports published in 1922 as *In Darkest Cuba*. Soon after the turn of the century, he once more was caught up in what Jones calls "Tillmania," but this time his adversary was Lieutenant Governor James Tillman, nephew of the senator, who also was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and at times a rival journalist. Their differences went back to the early '90s and included various personal disagreements, among them, a near duel. When Tillman decided to run for governor in 1902, the fight was on; although, in the opinion of Jones, Narcisco's thrusts lacked the humor displayed a decade earlier when he did battle with the well-known uncle. Despite bitter words—often four or more columns a day and not unlike what other newspapers were saying—Jim Tillman ran relatively well locally in the second primary, losing to Duncan Clinch Heyward 963-691 in Columbia and 1,529-1,077 in the county as a whole.³

Tillman stated in a circular letter that he blamed N. G. Gonzales for his defeat, but did nothing more until about 1:45 on the afternoon of 15 January 1903 when he walked up to Gonzales near the corner of Main and

Gervais and shot him at close range in the presence of several witnesses. Gonzales, who was unarmed, died four days later, and his assailant subsequently was acquitted ("self-defense") in a sensational trial held in Lexington County, not Richland.⁴

With the death of Narcisco, the task of running the *State* fell first to Ambrose and then William. In 1912, the latter labored hard for Woodrow Wilson, served as a Democratic elector, and was rewarded with the post of minister to Cuba. Six years later, he became ambassador to Peru (the first South Carolinian to achieve such rank), resigning, according to custom, when President Harding took office in 1921. William's return to Columbia also was prompted by the declining health of his elder brother. He first served as editor and then, upon the death of Ambrose in 1926, became publisher and president of the State Company.

William's tenure as head of what had become South Carolina's leading daily was a difficult eleven years. The boll weevil, agricultural distress, and the Great Depression all added up to trouble. Also, in the late 1920s, the *State's* afternoon rival, the *Columbia Record*, came under aggressive leadership that was determined to increase that paper's share of the local market. This confrontation was complicated by the fact that International Paper and Power, new owners of the *Record*, were the very people supplying newsprint to the *State*. Throughout these years, William, who died in October of 1937 during State Fair Week, struggled with various proposals to join the two dailies together; however, this did not occur until 1945 when the *State* purchased the *Record* for \$550,000.

In the midst of these trials, William Gonzales had one well-deserved moment of triumph. In the summer of 1930, publisher William LaVarre, architect for a brief time of the *Record's* new activism, offered a gold watch to be awarded to Columbia's "most useful citizen." It took a five-member committee only fourteen minutes to select his arch rival as the recipient of this honor. LaVarre, not pleased, was absent from any ceremony that ensued and told the group by telegram that it would have taken him "much longer" to reach the same decision.

Unlike LaVarre, William Elliott Gonzales looked upon his newspaper as "a Columbia institution," not as a private enterprise, yet frequently chided local merchants for not using the pages of the *State* to lure potential customers living in outlying areas. He was fully as public spirited as Ambrose, but had more business sense, and clearly possessed little of the rashness of Narcisco. Friend of men such as Woodrow Wilson, Bernard Baruch, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, his seventy-one years encompassed exciting events in both South Carolina and the nation . . . as well as cer-

emonies marking the centennial of the first legislative session held in Columbia (1891) and this city's sesquicentennial in 1936.

Reflecting upon the half century from 1890 to 1940, it is apparent that certain developments on the local scene have much more significance than others. At the top of the list one would have to put the cotton mills and mill villages of the 1890s and Camp Jackson, followed closely by the appearance of more and more improved streets and highways. At the bottom would be ill-fated schemes to link Columbia to the sea and efforts to transform the city into a winter resort for well-to-do Yankees. Also, a succession of music festivals, corn expositions, harvest jubilees, and Palmfestas—none of which lasted more than a few years—served only to prove that residents of the Midlands would support only one truly large annual blow-out: the South Carolina State Fair. Somewhere in between lie still other aspects of day-to-day existence such as various levels of education, religious and cultural life, commercial activity, and efforts to promote Columbia as the hub of a far-flung trading empire. In such pursuits, Richland County and its city could point to growth and improvement, but seldom were the results spectacular or unlike those experienced by similar communities during the same decades.

Cotton mills fulfilled a dream decades old, provided hundreds of jobs, increased Columbia's suburban population, comported well with local labor practices, and represented a long-range investment of a few million. Camp Jackson was something quite different. It was a short-term outlay several times as large that made mincemeat of the prevailing wage scale and, together with the upheaval of war, shook Columbia's social fabric for the first time in forty years.

Although this installation, which often had a temporary population greater than Columbia itself, existed in a formal manner only from September 1917 to September 1921, it was a force for substantial change. Even after the last soldier left, it continued to exert influence as a summer camp for national guardsmen, a federal forest preserve, storage facilities for a growing State Highway Department, an experimental farm, and target of various schemes for industrial development. Nineteen years later, as war loomed on the horizon, it was transformed into Fort Jackson and achieved the permanence long sought by Columbia's business community.

Of course, all of these changes were chronicled by the Columbia press. The best known of these newspapers were dailies such as the *Columbia Register* that folded in the late 1890s after nearly a quarter of a century, the *State*, and the *Daily Record*, which was established by