

Gaines, Francis Pendleton ^[1]

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by Henry S. Stroupe, 1986

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Francis Pendleton Gaines, president of [Wake Forest College](#) ^[2] and [Washington and Lee University](#) ^[3], was born in Due West, S.C., the son of William Arnold and Emma Brookhardt Gaines. Before Francis was a year old, his father, a [Baptist](#) ^[4] minister, moved the family to Virginia—first to Lebanon and then to Wytheville. Young Gaines was graduated from Fork Union Academy in 1909 and received the A.B. degree from Richmond College in 1912. After serving one year as principal of the public school at Green Bay, Va., he entered a graduate program at the [University of Chicago](#) ^[5], where he received the A.M. degree in 1914. During the next thirteen years Gaines combined graduate study at [Columbia University](#) ^[6] (Ph.D., 1924) with teaching English at Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College (1914–23) and [Furman University](#) ^[7] (1923–27). For several summers during this period he taught at Richmond, the University of Virginia, and Columbia. He also served for a time as literary editor of the Greenville (S.C.) *Piedmont*.

By 1927, when Wake Forest College was searching for a president, Gaines had become known in educational circles as an engaging teacher and gifted speaker. On 25 June of that year the Wake Forest board of trustees unanimously elected him president of the college. He accepted without ever having seen the campus or having been seen by the faculty.

[George Washington Paschal](#) ^[8] stated in his *History of Wake Forst College* ^[9] that, even though Gaines was little known to the general public, his "enthusiastic spirit and helpful disposition . . . soon won him favor." In his inaugural address he emphasized three points: "1. Wake Forest must be a small college; 2. It must be a cultural college; 3. It must be a Christian college." There were no recorded complaints against the last two points. The first, however, was regarded by many as counter to the purposes of the founders, the traditions of the institution, and the policies of all former presidents. Gaines subsequently proposed that the college adopt "a definite policy of limitation and selection of students," but the board declined to adopt the plan. Most Wake Forest officials favored admitting those who "met the terms of admission generally in force in the educational institutions of the State." Even so, during Gaines's administration the enrollment decreased from 742 to 617, with the number of entering freshmen dropping from 230 to 178. The size of the student body was the only major issue on which the president and other Wake Forest officials failed to agree.

The single factor that contributed most to Gaines's career was his oratorical skill. Professor Paschal, who knew him well, said he was "a ready speaker on many subjects—religion, education, literature, athletics, college affairs, dedications of buildings and stadiums, and was heard gladly whatever his subject, and his services were in constant requisition." In the 1940s he received approximately four hundred invitations a year to speak at functions throughout the country. In a typical year he made forty major addresses in twenty states. The *New York Times* ^[10] (2 Jan. 1964) noted that "Dr. Gaines was one of the South's most respected orators, known for precision and felicity of expression."

In 1930, Gaines resigned his position at Wake Forest in order to accept the presidency of Washington and Lee University, where he remained until his retirement in 1959. After he retired the trustees named him chancellor. As president of Washington and Lee, Gaines remained committed to the concept of a small university with high standards. Under his leadership, for example, Washington and Lee was the first university or college for men in the South to require specific College Entrance Examination Board scores for admission. During his administration the financial assets of the institution increased fivefold, and many improvements were made in educational programs as well as in the physical plant.

Although President Gaines's favorite pursuit was teaching comparative literature, his activities extended far beyond the Lexington campus. Among the off-campus positions he held after 1930 were director, [Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation](#) ^[11]; director, [George C. Marshall Foundation](#) ^[12]; president, [Cooperative Education Association of Virginia](#) ^[13] (1932–33); chairman, Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Virginia (1933–34); trustee, [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) ^[14]; trustee (1932–34), and member, Board of Visitors (1935–36), [U.S. Naval Academy](#) ^[15]; president, Southern University Conference (1939–40); chairman, State War Finance Committee of Virginia (1941–46); chairman, Virginia State Planning Board (1942–48); president, [Association of American Colleges](#) ^[16] (1944–45); chairman, Virginia Association for Independent Colleges (1953–55); and chairman, general awards jury, [Freedom Foundation](#) ^[17] (1956). In 1946, he was decorated by Great Britain with the King's Medal for Services. The same year the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce presented him its Distinguished Service Scroll for "cumulative services to Virginia and the nation." The wide recognition he received was further reflected in the variety and number of his honorary degrees: Litt.D., Duke (1928, his first) and Columbia; L.H.D., Rollins; LL.D., Baylor, Chattanooga, Furman, Hampden-Sydney, Mercer, North Carolina, Richmond, Wake Forest, Washington and Lee (1963, his last), Waynesburg, and William Jewel; and D.C.L., University of the South.

Gaines was the author of *The Southern Plantation* (1924), *Lee—The Final Achievement* (1933), and *Southern Oratory* (1947). He was also a contributor to the *Library of Southern Literature*, the *Dictionary of American Biography*, and other

publications. He was a member of the Modern Language Association, the Society of the Cincinnati^[18], Phi Gamma Delta, Phi Beta Kappa, and Omicron Delta Kappa. He was a Democrat^[19] and a Baptist^[4]. His hobby was collecting walking canes, of which he had about two hundred.

On 15 Mar. 1917, Gaines married Sadie du Vergne Robert, daughter of Joseph Clarke Robert, then dean of Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College. They had three sons: F. Pendleton, Jr., Edwin M., and W. Robert.

Gaines died at his home in Lexington, Va., and was buried in Stonewall Jackson Cemetery. There are portraits at Wake Forest and Washington and Lee universities.

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Who's Who in America, 1958–59.

Additional Resources:

Francis Pendleton Gaines. President, Washington and Lee University, 1930–1959:<http://www.wlu.edu/presidents-office/about-the-presidents-office/history-and-governance/past-presidents/francis-pendleton-gaines>^[20]

Search results for "Francis Pendleton Gaines" in WorldCat:https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3AGaines%2C+Francis+Pendleton%2C&qt=hot_author^[21]

The Collegian — University of Richmond, Volume XIV, Number 1, 23 September 1927<http://collegian.richmond.edu/cgi-bin/richmond?a=d&d=COL19270923.2.42&e=-----en-20--1--txt-IN----->^[22]

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