

Divine, John Francis ^[1]

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by Mary Virginia Horne, 1986

27 June 1830–21 Aug. 1909

John Francis Divine, railroad builder, was the son of Michael and Eleanor Patterson Divine from Glasgow, Scotland, who settled in Baltimore, Md., when their son was four. On 15 Sept. 1851 he moved south to superintend the building of locomotives for the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad ^[2]. After serving in the Confederate Army ^[3] during 1861–65, he returned to the road and in 1872 was appointed general superintendent. He later became general superintendent of the entire Atlantic Coast Line ^[4] system. Through his efforts, and those of Colonel R. R. Bridgers ^[5], president of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, B. F. Newcomer, and Henry Walters, the Coast Line system became one of the principal railroads of the South. Divine himself was recognized as one of the foremost railroad men of the region, and his advice was often sought by officials of other lines. When the city of Wilmington was without waterworks and fire protection and without funds to provide them in the 1880s, Divine, with Edwin Buruss and Edward Kidder, established the Clarendon Waterworks Company. These men invested their time and money without prospect of profit. Divine was president of the company until its sale to the city. He was also president of the Wilmington Bridge Company, which owned the only outlet by rail over the Cape Fear River ^[6]. He served for some time as an alderman and was a consistent Democrat ^[7].

On 13 Apr. 1861 Divine enlisted in the Goldsboro Rifles, later known as Company A, Twenty-seventh Regiment of the North Carolina Infantry. He was ordered with his company to Fort Macon ^[8] and was appointed quartermaster sergeant with the rank of captain on 15 July 1861. He was captured on 25 Apr. 1862, was exchanged in August, and was back on duty in September. He served until his discharge on 2 May 1865.

On 13 Dec. 1854, in Sussex County, Va., Divine married Augusta Elizabeth Howle, daughter of Epaphroditus Howle and Sallie Stuart. Some years after the Civil War ^[9] he bought a house on Chestnut Street in Wilmington ^[10] that had been constructed about the time of the American Revolution ^[11]. He and his wife were the parents of William Charles (m. Hattie Pendleton), Mary Elizabeth (m. Daniel P. Foley), Sarah Augusta (m. James Dudley Horne), John Sidney (m. Vina Hinton), Morrison W. (m. Eliza McPherson), and Virginia Stella (died unmarried). James Dudley Horne of Wadesboro, who married Sarah Augusta Divine in Wilmington on 13 Jan. 1892, was born 13 Feb. 1850 on the ancestral Horne plantation in Anson County ^[12] and died 17 May 1932; he was president of the First National Bank, a director of the Wade Manufacturing Company and West Knitting Mill, member of the state legislature, and owner of the J. D. Horne Company and of the Horne plantation. Their children were Elizabeth Divine Horne, Anne Baldwin Horne (m. George W. Little), Mary Virginia Horne, and Sarah Divine Horne (m. Clifton H. Sutherland).

Funeral services for Divine were conducted at Saint Thomas Catholic Church, Wilmington, of which he was a member. All engines of the Atlantic Coast Line ^[4] system were draped in black for his passing.

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Wilmington Dispatch, 22 Aug. 1909.

Wilmington Morning Star, 21 Aug. 1909.

Additional Resources:

Cape Fear Museum: <http://www.capefearmuseum.com/index.php?flag=collection&cat=Grow&id=207> ^[13]

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