

Holderness, George Allen ^[1]

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by H. C. Bridgers, Jr., 1988

15 June 1867–23 Dec. 1947

George Allen Holderness, businessman, farmer, banker, and state senator, was born in Caswell County ^[2] near Milton, the son of Sarah Foreman and William H. Holderness. In his youth he was a traveling salesman, operating out of both Baltimore and Philadelphia, and covering especially the towns along the Tar River where he became a popular drummer. He lived in Snow Hill for a few years before moving in 1893 to Tarboro, where he spent most of his life.

In the fall of 1894, Holderness and several others raised \$2,500 to establish the Tarboro Telephone ^[3] Company. In October 1895, an exchange with a capacity of 50 lines was opened in an upstairs office in the 400 block of Main Street; it had 30 subscribers. From this modest start, exchanges were established in other towns, and in 1900 the Carolina Telephone and Telegraph ^[4] Company was incorporated. Holderness was elected secretary-treasurer and general manager, and in 1926, president. He served as chairman of the board from 1938 to 1944. During the half century of his leadership, the company became a ten-million-dollar corporation with 96 exchanges virtually covering eastern North Carolina. Under his son, Haywood Dail, who was with the company for thirty-eight years, Carolina Telephone and Telegraph would earn hundreds of millions of dollars.

Holderness served on the directorate of countless business concerns in North Carolina and adjoining states. He was one of the organizers of Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company ^[5], of which his son Howard was president. For a few years Holderness lived in Richmond, Va., where he became president of the Virginia-Carolina Chemical Company. A prominent banker, he participated in the founding and became president of the First National and the Farmers Banking and Trust Co., both in Tarboro, and he served on the board of directors of the First and Merchants Bank of Richmond.

Applying his business acumen to farming, Holderness for many years progressively and successfully operated over 2,000 acres in Edgecombe County ^[6]. His Panola and Cotton Valley farms served as examples for others in the use of silage and tile drainage. He pioneered locally in extensive dairying and raising beef cattle in addition to the normal crops of his day.

An active Democrat ^[7], Holderness was elected to the state senate in 1916 and 1918. During his tenure he served as chairman of the powerful appropriations committee.

On 29 Nov. 1899 he married Harriet Howard of Tarboro. In addition to their sons Howard and Dail, they were the parents of George Allen, rear admiral in the U.S. Navy; William Henry ^[8], Greensboro attorney; Thomas Thurston, Greensboro financier; Anna Stamps (Mrs. William Munford Transom) of Greensboro; and Harriet (Mrs. Lee Ferguson Davis) of Richmond. In addition to achieving success in their chosen fields, as well as in the area of public service, each of their five sons and two daughters—and their spouses—were active in church and civic affairs.

Harriet Howard Holderness was a lifelong member and supporter of Howard Memorial Presbyterian Church in Tarboro. Both she and her husband were buried in Greenwood Cemetery. There is a portrait of George Holderness in the headquarters of the Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Co. in Tarboro.

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