

Peace, Samuel Thomas ^[1]

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by George T. Blackburn II, 1994

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Samuel Thomas Peace, banker, author, and historian, was born near Oxford, the son of Alexander Smith and Ella Grandy Peace. His father, an attorney, was descended from Joseph and Sarah Mass Peace, who settled at Tabbs Creek in the Kittrell Springs area shortly after the Tuscarora Indian massacre of 1713. These were the first known settlers of the land now comprising [Vance County](#) ^[2].

Peace received his preparatory education at [Horner School](#) ^[3] in Oxford in 1893 and 1897. Between these terms, he was employed as bookkeeper with the firm of J. C. Cooper and Son. In 1899 Peace participated in the organization of the Bank of Chapel Hill and served as its first cashier. He entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4] in 1901 and was active in student publications and the Kappa Alpha fraternity.

In 1905 Peace participated in the organization of the First National Bank in Henderson, where he permanently settled. From 1899 to 1935 he served as president of eleven corporations, several of which he organized. These included the First National Bank of Henderson, the Roanoke Bank and Trust Company of Roanoke Rapids, and the Corbitt Company of Henderson, which manufactured heavy-duty trucks.

In 1931 Peace published at his own expense the first of a series of "Christmas cards." This volume, entitled *Leaves of Leisure*, contained whimsical stories, poems, and anecdotes written by Peace and sent to friends as a Christmas gift. Similar volumes were published and distributed from 1932 to 1949. The stories are chiefly humorous in tone, though many are poignant. They treat subjects of local color and tradition as well as the author's personal experiences in a small North Carolina town of the period. The writings, which include numerous passages in dialect, exhibit a particular aptitude for coining or recording memorable local expressions for universal experiences. One of the stories describes in detail a backwoods black gathering near the state boundary whose participants were from both North Carolina and Virginia. The ancient narrator, lamenting that the party did not equal the rousings of his youth, sums it up as a case of "Too much Virginia and too little grape."

In addition to the Christmas cards, Peace published *Me and Ole' Kate* (1957), a further collection of stories. In 1955 he brought out *Zeb's Black Baby*, a history of the region that comprises Vance County from the colonial period. This volume has had numerous editions and remains the standard work for history of the area.

Peace was extremely popular as a dinner speaker and entertainer in Vance and surrounding counties. At age eighty, he organized the Mockingbird Combo, a musical group with which he performed on the harmonica at civic, charitable, and political events. On these occasions, he would delight audiences with his impromptu wit and humorous anecdotes between renditions of popular songs.

On 8 Dec. 1909 Peace married Willie Closs Parker, daughter of W. Scott and Lucy Closs Parker. Mrs. Peace was a local historian and philanthropist. The couple had three children: Samuel Thomas, Jr., Closs Peace Wardlaw, and Anne Peace Rawls. Peace was a member of the First Methodist Church of Henderson, the [Democratic party](#) ^[5], the Rotary Club, and the [Order of Freemasons](#) ^[6]. He died in Henderson and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

References:

[Daniel L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina*\(1924\).](#) ^[7]

Henderson Daily Dispatch, 2 Nov. 1964.

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