

Pou, James Hinton ^[1]

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by Charlotte Vestal Brown, 1994

21 July 1861–29 July 1935

James Hinton Pou, lawyer, politician, and Raleigh ^[2] land developer, was born in Tuskegee, Ala., the middle son of Edward William ^[3] and Anna Maria Smith Pou of Johnston County ^[4]. The family moved to a farm in Johnston County that Pou's mother had inherited shortly after the Civil War. The elder Pou had studied classics at the University of Georgia and then became a lawyer. He practiced in Smithfield. Pou's older brother, Edward, attended The University of North Carolina ^[5] and the Law School, but James was educated at home. He then read law under W. N. H. Smith and in 1885 was admitted to the bar.

In the period of Reconstruction ^[6] politics Pou emerged as an active, articulate Democrat and served three terms in the General Assembly ^[7]: in 1885 as a representative and in 1888 and 1892 as a senator. Although he was urged to pursue a career in politics, he chose to devote his time to his law practice.

Pou moved to Raleigh ^[2] in 1898, and it was from there that he gained fame for his skills in criminal trials. But he acquired substance and power from his civil and corporate practice, which involved him in the industrialization and urbanization of the state and the South.

In 1905 Pou became a member of the board of the Raleigh Electric Company (became Carolina Power and Light Company ^[8] in 1908). He served until 1911, when he was named the company's first general counsel, a position he held until his death. He also became a regular representative for Standard Oil of New Jersey and several other firms and with B. N. Duke ^[9] was engaged in the expanding textile industry in North Carolina.

The motives that prompted Pou's involvement in suburban development undoubtedly grew from his abilities as a practical man of business, but that involvement had a profound effect on the physical and visual development of Raleigh. In 1906 the Glenwood Land Company with Pou as its president opened for development the first important planned early twentieth-century suburb in the capital city. Designed with all possible conveniences, Glenwood prospered and established a precedent for subsequent development, extending the traditional values of home and land ownership to the new, growing middle class while enhancing the city with an architecturally homogeneous and beautiful suburb. In 1911 Pou was head of the firm that created and promoted Bloomsbury and was then involved in Hayes-Barton, the next important suburb in northwestern Raleigh.

Pou's fame as a trial lawyer derived from his involvement in a series of famous cases including the Cole murder case ^[10] in Rockingham County ^[11], the Peacock case in Johnston, the Lawrence case in Chatham, and the Libby Holman Reynolds case in Forsyth. It is said, however, that his ability as a speaker was based not on loud rhetoric but on the soundness of his argument, his wit, and his understanding of human psychology. These skills were demonstrated in the Founder's Day Speech he delivered at Trinity College ^[12] in Durham on 2 Oct. 1917. Entitled "No Compromise Peace," it seems to summarize Pou's personal and public philosophy. Elegantly organized and rich in biblical and classical allusions, it is in a rhetorical style which uses vivid phraseology and strong contrasts, the most interesting being that between the government of Prussia which he called a government by force and the government of the United States which he called a government by fraternity. A deeply patriotic and moving speech, it gained circulation both within and outside the state.

Pou practiced law briefly with Senator Furnifold Simmons ^[13], with Fuller Staples, with his son-in-law, Josiah W. Bailey ^[14], and with his son, James H. Pou, Jr.

Pou married Annie Walker of Asheboro in 1889 and they had two children: James H., Jr., and Edith Walker, who married Josiah Bailey. Age did not diminish his activities and he remained a powerful and respected figure until his death.

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