

April 8-90
York Observer Newspaper

JUST INOU.

Lee An Early Carolinas Power Figure

r
s
i
l
t
e
y
e
s

Bill Lee, chief executive officer of Duke Power Co., is the grandson and namesake of William States Lee Jr., a gifted engineer who was one of the pioneers in electrifying and industrializing this area.

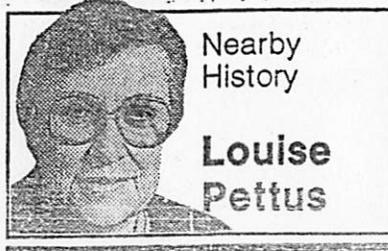


Lee

The first Bill Lee was born Jan. 2, 1872, in Lancaster County near Van Wyck, son of William States Lee and Jenny Lind Williamson Lee. When Lee was 4 years old, the family moved to Anderson.

Anderson County, at Portland Shoals, was destined to have the first cotton mill run by electric power transmitted over wire some distance from the river where the power was generated. Previously, cotton mills were either situated on river banks or on canals that were costly to construct.

William States Lee received a civil engineering degree from The Citadel in 1894. After his graduation, he returned to Anderson County to be assistant engineer



Nearby History

Louise Pettus

under William Church Whitner, the mastermind of the Portland Shoals plant. More stations were built in Anderson County and in Georgia.

Then Whitner married Katherine Roddey of Rock Hill. While on visits to Rock Hill, he took every opportunity to investigate the possibility of harnessing the Catawba River. Bill Lee, who had tramped every mile of the Catawba River from Camden to the N.C. mountains on summer vacations from college, also was enthusiastic about the river's potential.

Dr. Walker Gill Wylie of Chester and New York (assistant to the great surgeon, Dr. J. Marion Sims), was an enthusiastic backer of development of Catawba River electric power. It was inevitable that Whitner, Lee and Wylie would come together to build the first hydroelectric power of the

Catawba River at India Hook between Rock Hill and Fort Mill. They called their company the Catawba Power Co., which was to evolve into the Carolina Power Co., and eventually become the Duke Power Co.

Except for a short stint as an officer in the Army engineers during the Spanish American War, Bill Lee was to associate with Whitner until 1905, when he began a private practice as a consulting engineer in Charlotte. Lee became a specialist in high-tension hydroelectric power development and transmission.

Lee became James B. Duke's chief engineer and vice president of Duke Power Co. As such, he designed and built 32 hydroelectric stations and seven steam-electric stations along with about 4,000 miles of high-tension wires. This work was in the Piedmont of Carolina, but he also constructed giant stations in Quebec and Montreal in Canada.

In 1912, Lee designed, built and operated the Piedmont & Northern Railway. He was a consulting engineer for many large industrial enterprises — the Aluminum Company of America, American

Cyanamid Co., Buffalo-Niagara & Eastern Power Co. and International Paper Co., among others.

Lee also was an inventor. He devised a porcelain insulator that had a separable top, which made it easy for a lineman to replace insulators.

In 1931 the American Institute of Electrical Engineers elected William States Lee its president and the following year Lee was the president of the American Engineering Council.

He received two honorary degrees. Davidson College awarded him the honorary doctor of science degree in 1929, as did The Citadel in 1932. The Dictionary of American Biography says that Lee was a "Republican in politics and a Presbyterian in religion." Being a Presbyterian in Charlotte was easy, but being a Republican in his day must have been lonely.

By the time of his death in Charlotte on March 24, 1934, William States Lee, 61, vice president and chief engineer of Duke Power Co., was internationally famous.

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop College history professor.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
5708 SOUTH CAMPUS DRIVE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637
TEL: 773-936-3700
FAX: 773-936-3701
WWW.CHEM.UCHICAGO.EDU



10/16/04