

Fries, Francis Henry ^[1]

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by Tom E. Terrill, 1986

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A photograph of "Colonel" Francis Henry Fries, circa 1919. Image from Archive.org.

^[2]Francis Henry Fries, manufacturer, banker, and railroader, was born in Salem ^[3], the son of Francis Levin ^[4] and Lisetta Maria Vogler Fries. His mother was the granddaughter of the silversmith ^[5], John Vogler ^[6], a prominent figure in early Salem; his father was active in community affairs and politics, serving in the General Assembly ^[7] in 1858–59. Young Fries attended the Salem Boys School and then was graduated from Davidson College ^[8] in 1874. His career resembled that of his father, who founded the first successful textile mill ^[9] in Salem. The Fries Manufacturing Company was built in 1839, became the F and H Fries Manufacturing Company in 1846, and was operated until 1928. It produced the famous "Salem Jeans." Fries, like his brothers, became a partner in the firm at age twenty-one; he was superintendent until 1887. In 1881 he built Arista Mills, the first mill in North Carolina to have electric lights. Shortly afterward, he started the Indera Mills.

In 1887, at the urging of R. J. Reynolds ^[10] and others, Fries assumed the task of building a 122-mile railroad to cross the mountains and connect Winston and Salem to Roanoke. Completed in 1891 at a cost of \$2 million, the Roanoke and Southern Railway, which Fries served at times as president and general manager, became part of the Norfolk and Western rail system in 1892. Plans to build another line from Winston and Salem to Wadesboro in order to connect with the Atlantic Coastline Railroad were postponed because of the depression of the 1890s. Later, in 1909–10, Fries helped his brother, Henry Elias Fries ^[11], then president of the Winston-Salem Southbound Railroad ^[12], complete the line to Wadesboro. The purpose of these rail lines was to prevent Winston and Salem from being commercially isolated.

In 1893, Fries went into banking as president of the first trust company in North Carolina, the Wachovia Loan and Trust Company, organized in 1891 by his uncle Henry, his brother John, and others. In 1911, this company joined with the Wachovia National Bank to become the Wachovia Bank and Trust Company ^[13], which became one of the largest in the South. Fries remained president until his death.

He also stayed heavily involved in the textile industry. In addition to his responsibilities at Arista Mills and Indera Mills, he founded Mayo Mills and the town of Mayodan in 1896, the Avalon Mills near Mayodan in 1899, and the Washington Mills at Fries, Va., in 1901. In 1923, these last three mills were consolidated as the Washington Mills at Fries, Va. Fries was president of the mills he organized as well as vice-president and director of the Oakdale Mills in Jamestown, president of the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company ^[14], and a director of several other companies.

A Democrat ^[15], Fries limited his political participation to serving on the staff of Governor Alfred M. Scales ^[16] (1885–89), acquiring the title "Colonel," which he used thereafter as a convenient way to distinguish his name from that of his father. In 1904, he was elected president of the North Carolina Bankers Association ^[17], and he headed the trust section of the

American Bankers Association. During World War I ^[18], he was a director of War Savings in North Carolina. Active in the Moravian church ^[19] and his community, Fries was a Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years and a trustee of Salem Academy and College ^[20]. He initiated the Winston-Salem Foundation ^[21], which in 1970 had assets of \$25 million.

On 23 Nov. 1881 he married Letitia Walker Patterson, granddaughter of Governor John Motley Morehead ^[22] and daughter of a leading North Carolina textile family; she died in 1884. Their only child, Louis Morehead, died in 1882. Fries's second wife, whom he married on 19 Aug. 1886, was Pauline deSchweinitz, daughter of a bishop of the Moravian church. Their only child, Rosa Eleanor, married Richard Furman Willingham. After his death in Winston-Salem ^[23], Fries was buried in Salem Cemetery.

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"Colonel Francis Henry Fries House on High Street." Photograph. 1940s. Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection. Digital Forsyth. <http://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/11983> ^[28] (accessed March 25, 2013).

"Francis Henry Fries (1855-1931) was the son of Francis Levin Fries and Lisetta Maria Fries nee Vogler. He married Letitia Patterson and after her death married Anna de Schweinitz." Old Salem Museums and Gardens. Digital Forsyth. <http://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/10485> ^[29] (accessed March 25, 2013).

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"F.H. Fries." *History of North Carolina*. Chicago : New York : Lewis Publishing Co. 1919. 3. <https://archive.org/stream/historyofnorthca05#page/2/mode/2up> ^[2] (accessed March 25, 2013).

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