

Ivey, George Franks [1]

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by Garland R. Stafford, 1988

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George Franks Ivey, textile and furniture manufacturer, author, and churchman, was born at Morganton of English and German ancestry, the eighth child of George Washington and Selina Neal Ivey. His father, a beloved and prominent minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was reared in Stanly County [2] and served pastorates in South Carolina and west central North Carolina for fifty-two years. Endowed with a good mind, resolute character, and Christian conviction, he had great human understanding and was welcome in any company; he also was industrious and frugal, traits necessary in a man who had to raise ten children on a minister's salary during Reconstruction [3]. Selina Ivey, reared in McDowell County [4], was a woman of practical judgment who managed her family well.

Young Ivey was educated in the local schools and at Trinity College [5] (later Duke University [6]), from which he was graduated in 1890. Desiring to learn mechanical skills, he went in the fall to Taunton, Mass., where he was employed by Mason Machine Works. Later he worked for Kilburn and Lincoln in Fall River, Mass.

In 1893 Ivey returned to North Carolina and accepted employment at Henrietta Mills at \$1.00 a day. After several months he left Henrietta to become superintendent of the cotton mill at Granite Falls at \$2.50 per day; there, he upgraded the mill by getting more modern machinery installed. From Granite Falls he went to Bessemer City to superintend the Southern Cotton Mills. Next, he was put in charge of the mill at Forest City.

On the recommendation of S. B. Tanner, Ivey secured a position as instructor in textiles at the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Raleigh. During his first year of teaching, an innocent infraction of postal regulations—of which he was exonerated—led the school's president to ask for his resignation, which was given in March. At the time, Ivey regarded the incident as a great misfortune. Nevertheless, as a result of it he returned to manufacturing where his abilities were successfully employed for the rest of his life.

The next fall he secured the post of superintendent of the Holt Williamson Mill at Fayetteville. He stayed there a year before becoming superintendent of the E. L. Shuford Manufacturing Co. in Hickory and later of the Bessemer City Cotton Mills.

For some time Ivey had wanted to have a mill of his own. In 1903, in collaboration with A. A. Shuford, he built the Ivey Cotton Mill in Hickory and became its manager. This mill produced high quality products, including sateen. For ten years all went well. The mill was enlarged more than once, and as the business expanded additional stock had to be issued. But Shuford's death in 1912 and the sale of the additional stock enabled others to gain control of the mill, and in 1913 Ivey was replaced as manager.

In 1908 Ivey had invented a wooden lug strap that was used in cotton mills. Soon he and a friend began to manufacture the lug straps and other mill supplies. The business prospered. When his associate decided to sell his equity in the firm, Ivey and another partner assumed ownership. Noting that a large portion of the desks in North Carolina schools were made outside of the state, Ivey and his new partner began to manufacture school desks under the firm name of Southern Desk Company. After severing his connection with the Ivey Cotton Mill he became personally involved in the Southern Desk Company. In 1920 he became the sole owner. The company grew to become a major national producer of high quality desks, chairs, church furniture, and other items.

At one time Ivey held stock in his brother's mercantile business in Charlotte. In partnership with J. B. Ivey and E. C. Ivey he went into the manufacture of juvenile furniture, a venture that proved unprofitable even though the company diversified its products. He also became a partner in a dining room furniture manufacturing company that fell victim to the depression and other contingencies in the early thirties.

In addition to manufacturing, Ivey was associated with various other businesses and community enterprises. He became a director in the company that built Hotel Hickory in 1924, and for about twenty-five years he was president of the Howard-Hickory Co., a nursery business. He also had an interest in a feldspar mine in the Spruce Pine area. When he built a new home and could not dispose of his old one advantageously, he made it into apartments and got into the rental housing business.

Ivey helped many young people obtain a college education. He was a trustee of Brevard College [7] until his death, and for twenty-five years he was a trustee and the secretary and treasurer of Rutherford College [8]. In the latter position, he was deeply involved in the difficulties of financing a small church-related institution. Also, seeing the need to help those in retirement, he played a leading role in establishing the Methodist Home for the Aged in Charlotte.

Ivey was the author of *Loom Fixing and Weaving* [9], written because he was unable to find such a manual while employed at Henrietta Mills. The book went through four editions and for twenty years was used as a text by the Georgia Institute of Technology and for half that long by the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. In 1926 he wrote a book on *The Physical Properties of Lumber* [10]. Another book, *Carding and Spinning* [11], was published for mill management. His autobiography and other writings appeared in 1945 under the title, *Humor and Humanity* [12].

Ivey's interest in trees prompted him to give an arboretum to Carolina Park in Hickory. It contains over 250 species of trees. In addition, he accumulated one of the most complete collections of Confederate money to be found anywhere.

Long active in the *Methodist church* [13], Ivey became superintendent of the Sunday school of the First Methodist Church soon after his arrival in Hickory in 1903 and held the post for thirty years. As a result of his work and popularity in the Western North Carolina Conference, he was elected a delegate to the 1944 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference that met in Atlanta.

On 14 June 1899 Ivey married Edith Blanche Sherrill of Sherrill's Ford. They had six children: Elbert, who worked with his father in Hickory and died in 1942; Dorothy (m. Dr. Ralph C. Flowers) of Hickory; Leon S., who worked with his father in Hickory and succeeded him when he died; Christine, who died in infancy; Edith (m. J. E. Pugh) of Hickory; and Lucille (m. H. L. Barrett, Jr.) of Charlotte. Ivey died suddenly of a heart attack and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Hickory.

References:

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George Franks Ivey, *Humor and Humanity* (1945 [portrait]).

Additional Resources:

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