

## **Gray, Bowman** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Gray, Bowman**

by [William S. Powell](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, 1986

**1 May 1874–7 July 1935**



Bowman Gray. Image courtesy of UNC Libraries.

<sup>[3]</sup>Bowman Gray, tobacco executive, was born in [Winston](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, the son of James Alexander and Aurelia Bowman Gray. He attended local schools and was enrolled in [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[5]</sup> for the year 1890–91. Withdrawing, he became a clerk in the [Wachovia National Bank](#) <sup>[6]</sup> of which his father was cashier and one of the founders. He joined the [R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company](#) <sup>[7]</sup> as a salesman in 1895 and covered the state of Georgia where he was remarkably successful. After two years he was promoted to eastern sales manager and stationed in Baltimore, Md., where his two sons were born. Further promotion came in 1912, when he was made vice-president and director of the company with offices in Winston. In 1924 he became president, succeeding [William Neal Reynolds](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, and in 1931 he became chairman of the board, the post he held at the time of his death.

Much credit has been ascribed to Gray for the rise of the Reynolds company from fourth to first place in size among tobacco manufacturing plants. Gray, a [Methodist](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, donated the property on which Centenary Methodist Church was built in Winston-Salem. He also contributed generously to orphanages and hospitals. At the time of his death, Gray's holdings in the Reynolds company alone were valued at \$12 million. A benevolent fund that he created made possible the establishment of the [Bowman Gray School of Medicine](#) <sup>[10]</sup> of [Wake Forest College](#) <sup>[11]</sup> in Winston-Salem.

In Baltimore on 1 Oct. 1902, he married Nathalie Fontaine Lyons, daughter of Hyman Hart and Ann Elizabeth Maffit Lyons of [Asheville](#) <sup>[12]</sup>. They were the parents of two sons, Bowman, Jr., and Gordon. Gray died of a heart attack on a cruise ship off the coast of Norway and was buried at sea off North Cape above the Arctic Circle.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

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The Carolina Story: <http://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/names/bowman-gray-sr-1874-1935-and-bowman-gray-swimming-/> [3]

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