

Poe, Clarence Hamilton ^[1]

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by Charles Aycock Poe, 1994

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Photograph of Clarence Hamilton Poe posing with the 75th anniversary edition of *Progressive Farmer* (1956). Image from the Special Collections Research Center at the North Carolina State University Libraries.

^[2]Clarence Hamilton Poe, editor, publisher, and author, was born on his father's small cotton farm near the town of Gulf, [Chatham County](#) ^[3], the only son of William Baxter (1839–1907) and Susan Dismukes Poe (1846–1911). Prominent in the maternal ancestry was [Augustine Shepperd](#) ^[4] (1792–1864), of [Surry](#) ^[5] and [Forsyth](#) ^[6] counties, who served nine terms in Congress between 1827 and 1851, in the later years as a [Whig](#) ^[7].

What little formal education Poe received was chiefly in a one-room country school known as Rocky Branch School, which was in operation three to four months of each year, plus one year of high school in Greensboro. However, he read eagerly and was encouraged by his mother, a former teacher, to develop his talent for writing. At age sixteen he went to Raleigh to work as associate editor for the *Progressive Farmer* ^[8], a weekly paper that had been founded in Winston in 1886 by Colonel [Leonidas Lafayette Polk](#) ^[9]. Poe became editor on 4 July 1899. In 1903 he purchased the paper and together with Dr. B. W. Kilgore, [Josiah William Bailey](#) ^[10], Dr. C. W. Burkett, and [T. B. Parker](#) ^[11] organized the Agricultural Publishing Company, the name of which was later changed to the Progressive Farmer Company. Poe served as president from the firm's inception until January 1954, after which he served as senior editor and board chairman until his death. The headquarters of the company were moved to Birmingham, Ala., in 1911, but Poe continued to direct its operations from his Raleigh office. Between 1903 and 1930, fourteen other farm papers were bought or merged into *Progressive Farmer*; its circulation expanded from 5,000 to 1,400,000, and *Progressive Farmer* became the dominant farm publication in the South and one of the strongest in the United States.

Poe studied agricultural and social conditions abroad on trips to Europe in 1908 and 1912 and on a trip around the world in 1910–11. He was the author of *Cotton: Its Cultivation, Marketing and Manufacture* ^[12], with C. W. Burkett (1906); *A Southerner in Europe* ^[13] (1908); *Where Half the World Is Waking Up* ^[14] (1912); *Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock* ^[15], with [R. D. W. Connor](#) ^[16] (1912); *How Farmers Cooperate and Double Profits* ^[17] (1915); *True Tales of the South at War* ^[18] (1961); and *My First Eighty Years* ^[19] (1963).

In the field of agriculture he was a member of the [State Board of Agriculture](#) ^[20] (1913–31), Advisory Council of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1933), and National Commission on Farm Tenancy (1934); president of the State Farmers' Convention (1919–20), State Dairymen's Association (1929–30), North Carolina Forestry Foundation (1935–40), National Agricultural Conference (1936), and American Country Life Association (1940–41); and master of the [North Carolina State Grange](#) ^[21] (1929–30). In 1936–45 he represented American agriculture on the Federal Board for Vocational Education. Poe received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Future Farmers of America (1911), North Carolina State College (1935), Southern Agricultural Workers (1942), North Carolina State Grange (1947), National 4-H Congress (1951), American Association of Agricultural College Editors (1952), and North Carolina Farm Bureau (1955). In 1949 he was granted honorary membership in Alpha Zeta, the national agricultural fraternity; in 1964 he received the Award of National Convocation of the Church in Town and Country; and in 1966 he was named to the [North Carolina Agricultural Hall of Fame](#) ^[22].

In the field of education, he was a trustee of [Wake Forest College](#) ^[23] (1915–47); chairman, executive committee of the board of trustees, North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering (1916–31); member, executive committee,

and chairman, Agriculture Committee, Trustees of the Consolidated University of North Carolina (1931–55); and member, board of advisers, Institute of Public Affairs, University of Virginia (1927–32). He also served as a member of the Raleigh School Board. He received honorary degrees from Wake Forest College (doctor of literature, 1914); The University of North Carolina ^[24] (doctor of laws, 1928); Washington College (Maryland) (doctor of laws, 1929); Clemson Agricultural College (doctor of science, 1937), and North Carolina State College (doctor of agricultural education, 1951).

The great variety of his interests is indicated by other numerous activities and awards. He was president of the State Press Association ^[25] (1913–14), North Carolina Conference for Social Service ^[26] (1913–15), and State Literary and Historical Association ^[27] (1914–15). In 1925–64 he was an elector of the Hall of Fame; in 1926–60, director of the North Carolina State Art Society ^[28] (also part-time chairman of its executive committee); and in 1933–35, head of the North Carolina Rural Electrification Authority ^[29]. He was a member of the Raleigh Board of Managers of the Wachovia Bank and Trust Company ^[30] (1924–33), Commission to Draft a Revision of the State Constitution (1931–32), State Planning Board ^[31] (1935), National Advisory Committee of National Youth Administration (1935–43), National Committee on Hospital Care (1944–46), North Carolina Hospital and Medical Care Commission (1944–55 [vice-chairman, 1945–55]), Jackson-Johnson-Polk Monument Commission (1947–48), Commission on Health Needs of the Nation (1951–52), International Development Advisory Board (known as the Rockefeller Commission, 1951–55), State Art Commission (1951–61), and State Commission on Racial Segregation in the Schools (1954–55). In addition, he was chairman of the State Committee that secured ratification of five constitutional amendments (1936), National Advisory Committee on Rural Electrification (1936), and Southern Governors' Campaign for Balanced Prosperity in the South (1940–43).

In World War I ^[32] he was a member of the Executive Committee of State Food and Fuel Administration and the War Savings Committee. In World War II ^[33] he was a member of the North Carolina Council of National Defense, State Council of Civilian Defense, and National Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, as well as chairman of Executive Committee of the North Carolina Farm Manpower Commission.

Poe twice won the Patterson Cup Award ^[34] for best North Carolina book of the year (1909, 1912). He was named Citizen of the Year by the North Carolina Citizens' Association (1955). Other honors included the Distinguished Service Award from The University of North Carolina School of Medicine (1957) and from the National Council of Churches of Christ (1964), the World Peace Award from the American Freedom Association (1962), and the North Carolina Award ^[35] for Distinguished Public Service (1964).

Goldsboro editor Henry Belk ^[36] said: "If one were asked to name the North Carolinian who has made the greatest contribution to progress and enlightenment, to education and health and improved living, most would name Dr. Poe." Similarly, Virginius Dabney, Richmond, Va., editor, observed: "If a list were drawn up of the half-dozen men who have done most for the South since 1900, it would have to include Dr. Clarence Poe."

For years Poe conducted extensive dairy, tobacco, cotton, and poultry production operations on his 800-acre Longview Farm. He also served as president (1937–55) and board chairman (1938–64) of Longview Gardens, Inc., a suburban real estate firm that sold residential lots and built and operated a neighborhood shopping center. Poe's leisure activities included horseback riding, landscaping, and gardening. He held membership in the First Baptist Church, Raleigh Rotary Club, Watauga Club ^[37] (longtime president), and Sandwich Club.

He married, in Raleigh on 29 May 1912, Alice Varina, daughter of Charles B. Aycock ^[38], former governor of North Carolina (1901–5). They had three children: Charles Aycock, Raleigh attorney; William D., edition editor of the *Progressive Farmer* (d. 1958); and Jean Shepperd, who married Gordon Smith, Jr. Clarence Poe had one sister, Daisy Poe Moore, of Gulf. He died in Raleigh at age eighty-three, still writing his column for the *Progressive Farmer* and working on his eighth book.

Educator Resources:

Tar Heel Travelers Lesson Plan ^[39], State Archives of North Carolina

References:

Better Crops with Plant Food 44 (September 1960).

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Joseph A. Cote, "Crusading Editor, 1881–1964" (doctoral diss., University of Georgia, 1976) and "Clarence Hamilton Poe: The Formative Years, 1899–1917" (master's thesis, East Carolina University, 1969).

Greensboro Daily News, 9 May 1958.

Nat. Cyc. Am. Biog., vol. 52 (1970).

Raleigh News and Observer, 24 Feb. 1952, 9 Oct. 1964.

Richmond Times-Dispatch, 4 Jan. 1954.

Who Was Who in America, vol. 4 (1968).

Additional Resources:

"Clarence Poe 1881-1964." N.C. Highway Historical Marker H-101, N.C. Office of Archives & History. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=H-101> [40] (accessed July 3, 2013).

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North Carolina Agricultural Hall of Fame Inductees. North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. <http://www.ncagr.gov/paffairs/aghall/poe.htm> [22] (accessed July 3, 2013).

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Special Collections Research Center at NCSU Libraries. North Carolina State University. <http://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/0050395> [2] (accessed July 3, 2013).

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