FRANK HUME

(Source: Pure Food Magazine I (May 1898), p. 19.)
The name Frank Hume is familiar to the members of the Arlington Historical Society. He donated land for the school on Ridge Road that bears his name and now houses the Society's museum. Perhaps less well known is Hume's successful business career and his active and extensive participation in civic and political activities. He was one of the original suburbanites. His business was located in Washington, D.C., and he resided in Alexandria County (subsequently renamed Arlington County). Yet his interests and activities were not restricted to either the District of Columbia or Virginia. Rather, he worked untiringly for the betterment of both areas, and the range of his efforts was truly remarkable.

Frank Hume was a Virginian. He was born in Culpeper County on July 21, 1843, the fourth son of Charles and Virginia Rawlins Hume. In the late 1850's, Hume's father accepted a position in the administration of James Buchanan and the family moved to Alexandria where they lived in a house on Queen Street. Soon after arriving in Alexandria, young Frank started working as a clerk in a grocery store in Washington, D.C.¹

Though only eighteen when the Civil War began in 1861, Frank Hume decided to enter the army in the defense of his native state. He left Washington in July 1861, moved through the Union lines, and made his way to Manassas. There he joined four cousins and enlisted in the Volunteer Southerns, Company A, 21 Mississippi Regiment, Barksdale's Brigade, Longstreet's Corps. He served in that unit for the duration of the war and saw action in eleven major battles, including, among others, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Marye's Heights, Gettysburg, where he was wounded, and Chickamauga.² Hume's own accounts of experiences at Gettysburg and a special scouting mission for General J.E.B. Stuart across the Potomac into enemy-held Maryland in 1864 have appeared in this Magazine.³

When the war ended, Hume heeded Lee's advice to return home and "make a crop," and he went to Orange County, Virginia, to take up farming.⁴ But a country existence was not to Frank Hume's liking and, after several years of farming, he returned to Washington. In 1869, he launched a new career and began clerking in a grocery store in Georgetown. The commercial life obviously suited him and he prospered. In 1871, he entered into partnership with Richard Poole in a wholesale grocery and liquor business called Poole & Hume, located at 222 3rd Street, N.W.⁵
Richard Poole was in poor health and, during the following year, 1872, Hume became the sole owner of the business, known simply as Frank Hume. He advertised special attention to orders as well as goods packed and delivered free of charge. In 1872, he moved the business to 454 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., a location he was to occupy for the rest of his business career. He made the move, undoubtedly, to be near the Center Market which occupied a new building in 1872 just south of Pennsylvania Avenue between 7th and 9th Streets, N.W. (where the National Archives Building is now located).

Meantime, on June 22, 1870, Frank Hume had married Emma Phillips Norris, the daughter of Washington lawyer John E. Norris, in Trinity Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C. The young couple took up residence at 216 C Street, N.W., and their first child, Charles Rawlins Hume, was born there on April 5, 1871. The infant lived only two months, but the Humes were to be blessed with ten more children in the following years.

In 1878, Frank Hume formed a partnership with James K. Cleary. The new enterprise, operating under the name of Hume, Cleary & Co., dealt in “Fine Groceries, Havana and Key West Cigars, Wines, Brandy, and Whiskey, Imported and Domestic.” The business continued to be located at 454 Pennsylvania Avenue and also acquired a second location at 807 Market Space, just across Pennsylvania Avenue from the Center Market.

Frank Hume and James Cleary continued in business for over a decade. The firm prospered and the extent of its business is indicated by the fact that Hume, Cleary & Co. had a telephone by 1888 when telephones were still rare in Washington. In 1890, Hume became the sole owner of the business. He continued to own and operate Hume & Co., as it was subsequently known, until his death in 1906. The business flourished and Hume & Co. became the largest wholesale grocer in the city.

Frank Hume had other commercial interests in addition to his grocery business. He was president of the Independent Steamboat and Barge Company and served as a director of the Fireman’s Insurance Company. In addition, he sat for a time of the Board of Directors of the National Bank of Washington. He also participated in the financing and marketing of the Mergenthaler type-setting machine, which at the time revolutionized the printing trade. His business interests extended into Virginia as well. He owned a large holding in the Rosslyn area and he was a stockholder in the Rosslyn Improvement Company. He worked for the incorporation of Rosslyn in order to free the area of “disorderly” elements from Washington. He believed that proper municipal regulations and government, even though they might mean higher taxes, would bring better control and conditions.

His business success enabled Hume in 1879 to purchase a country estate, Warwick, across the river from Washington in the extreme southern portion of Alexandria County. The house stood on high ground with a commanding view over the surrounding country, Alexandria City, and the Potomac. At the
Warwick as it appeared in 1899. The cannon on the lawn was captured with Jefferson Davis.  
(Source: Souvenir Sesquicentennial of Alexandria, Va. [1899].)

The Hume Spring on the Warwick estate.  
(Source: Alexandria, U.S.A., Yesterdays Remembered.)
time of the original purchase in 1879, Warwick included ninety-seven acres, but over the years, Hume added to the property until it comprised more than 600 acres. He farmed the estate in model fashion and proved himself an able farmer as well as merchant.14

Warwick became renowned in Alexandria County and City. The Humes entertained in the grand manner and Warwick was the scene of many notable gatherings including several reunions of his old Civil War unit. Hume collected cannons, particularly ones from the Civil War, and displayed them on the lawn at Warwick.15 Another interesting feature of the estate was Hume Spring. Hume fitted up the spring as a resort and it became a popular public spot.16

With his business in Washington and his home in Virginia, Frank Hume took an active role in the civic and political affairs of both areas. In 1899, Hume joined with a number of other prominent Washington businessmen, including S. Walter Woodward of Woodward & Lothrop and Julius Lansburg of the furniture store of the same name, to found the Washington Board of Trade. The new organization was organized to represent all sections and interests of the city and to promote the well-being of the city. Hume was elected a director of the Board of Trade upon its organization and served in that capacity, being repeatedly re-elected to three-year terms, until his death in 1906. In addition, he served on both the Bridges and Railroads Committees of the Board and was named Chairman of its Mount Vernon Avenue Committee in 1889.17

Frank Hume was the logical choice to serve as Chairman of the Board's Mount Vernon Avenue Committee. Not only did he reside in Virginia, but he had been active in the promotion of a Mount Vernon Avenue. The idea for a memorial boulevard linking Washington with Mount Vernon had arisen in 1886. A group of interested citizens of Washington, Alexandria County and City, and Fairfax County met in Alexandria City in 1887 and organized the Mount Vernon Avenue Association. Frank Hume participated and was elected a director from Alexandria County.

In 1889, Congress appropriated $10,000 for surveys and studies of the project and a plan for a grand seventeen-mile boulevard was produced. The proposed avenue followed a more inland route than the riverfront parkway built in the 20th Century. It would have begun at the Virginia end of a memorial bridge from Washington, run along the old Georgetown-Alexandria Road to Columbia Pike, then along the route of present day Ridge Road and Mount Vernon Avenue through Alexandria, to Mount Vernon ending at the tomb of George Washington. The avenue would have crossed Hume's Warwick property and Hume Spring would have been in the center of the roadway. The proposal called for a grand boulevard, combining the ideas of "the Appian Way in Rome and Westminster Abbey in London;" it was to be 250 feet wide with the roadway occupying sixty feet and residue used for plantings of trees, shrubbery, and flowers and with marble and bronze statues of distinguished citizens and foreign soldiers who aided the American cause in the Revolution.18
It was at this point that the Washington Board of Trade came into existence, and Frank Hume, as Chairman of the Mount Vernon Avenue Committee, took up the job of convincing Congress to accept the plan and provide the necessary funding for construction. In the Board's first annual report, Hume states that this Committee had not only made every effort to demonstrate the necessities and advantages of the avenue but also placed it "on the higher plane of patriotism."  

After the first year, the Board of Trade discontinued the Mount Vernon Avenue Committee, possibly because it was more a Virginia matter than a Washington one or, perhaps, because the Mount Vernon Avenue Association was already promoting the project. In any event, the avenue as planned by the Association was never realized although a portion of its route bears the name of Mount Vernon Avenue in Alexandria today.

Closely linked with the Mount Vernon Avenue Plan was a proposal for a memorial bridge across the Potomac. Proposals for such a bridge dated back to a suggestion by President Andrew Jackson in 1831. In the late 1880's, the idea of a bridge as a memorial to American patriotism was revived in association with the Mount Vernon Avenue concept. With the establishment of the Washington Board of Trade, its Bridges Committee, with Frank Hume as a member, began to work for a number of projects including a memorial bridge. Every year thereafter, the Bridges Committee pressed Congress for legislation and funds for the bridge. In 1899, Congress did appropriate $5,000 for design and estimates and the following year the Senate voted $200,000 to begin construction, but the House failed to pass the bill.

In 1903, Frank Hume became Chairman of the Bridges Committee, a position he held until his death. But he had no success in securing Congressional approval for a memorial bridge. While Hume was a member and then Chairman of the Bridges Committee, a number of other bridges were built in Washington including the Connecticut Avenue Bridge across Rock Creek Valley, the Anacostia Bridge, the Piney Branch Bridge, a new railroad bridge across the Potomac, the New York Avenue Bridge over the B & O Railroad, and, most importantly for Arlington, the Potomac Highway (14th Street) Bridge, which opened for operation in February 1906.

Frank Hume also served on the Railroads Committee of the Washington Board of Trade. He became Chairman of the Committee in 1894 and sought two major objectives in accord with the established policy of the Board — elimination of all street level grade crossings in favor of either elevation or suppression of the tracks and a union passenger depot. Each year in his annual report for the Committee, Hume pointed out the dangers of street level crossings and gave vivid accounts of accidents and deaths that had resulted during the year.

Hume's efforts on behalf of the Railroads Committee met with more success than those for a memorial bridge or a Mount Vernon Avenue. In 1901,
Congress passed a bill to prohibit grade crossings and appropriated money to assist the railroads in this task. The Board of Trade's support for a union station coincided with the efforts of the "city beautiful" movement which advocated civic improvement and beautification in America's cities. In Washington, the movement took form in the McMillan Committee which, among other things, wanted removal of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station from the center of the Mall. At the urging of both the McMillan Committee and the Railroads Committee of the Board of Trade, Congress did in 1903 authorize construction of "a great passenger union station" at Massachusetts Avenue, just east of North Capital Street. The approval of the Union Station came as a fitting close to Hume's career on the Railroads Committee, for he relinquished the chairmanship in 1903 to assume leadership of the Bridges Committee.

Another of Frank Hume's civic interests was the pure food movement. His activity in this regard is particularly remarkable considering the fact that he was in the wholesale grocery business. In the 1880's and 1890's, there was growing concern in the United States over the sale of contaminated food, foods containing harmful additives, and patent medicines of questionable, or even harmful, value. A number of individual state laws were enacted but these lacked uniformity, and some overall standards as well as nationwide enforcement were needed.

In January 1898, Frank Hume joined with a number of prominent Washingtonians, including the health officer of the city, the president of the D.C. pharmaceutical society, and the vice president of the National Dairy Union for D.C. to issue a call for a national pure food and drug congress to meet in Washington in March of that year. The purpose of the meeting would be to draft a pure food and drug law for submission to Congress. Frank Hume was chosen chairman of this Call Committee and, as such, had responsibility for arranging the Congress. He did so with typical efficiency. Delegates from twenty-one national and 150 state and local organizations as well as representatives sent by the governors of twenty-four states assembled in Washington during the period March 2-5, 1898.

As Call Committee Chairman, Frank Hume opened the Pure Food and Drug Congress at Columbian University (now George Washington University). He exhorted the delegates that their work was of the greatest national importance. "It extends," he said, "beyond the nation, for it affects every people to whom we export our food and drugs." Officers were chosen and Hume was unanimously elected Vice President. The Congress then turned to its work and prepared and presented to the U.S. Congress a pure food and drug bill.

Congress, however, was preoccupied with the war with Spain in 1898 and took no action on the proposed law. Several more pure food congresses followed in various cities located throughout the United States, although there
is no evidence that Frank Hume participated in these. Finally, on 30 June 1906, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which prohibited movement of adulterated foods and drugs in interstate commerce and required honest labelling. Hume was already seriously ill when Congress adopted this Act, and he died several weeks later. But it must have given him satisfaction in his final illness to know that he contributed to the enactment of a law for the benefit of the health of the entire country.

Hume also worked to improve health care in Washington. He had a continuing interest in Providence Hospital and served as a member of its board for twenty years. He was also one of the original incorporators of the Episcopal Eye, Ear, and Throat Hospital of Washington.

Frank Hume was also interested and involved in social problems. His concern for the unemployed was evidenced in his assistance to Coxey's Army in 1894. In the spring of that year, which was a period of sharp economic depression, "General" Jacob S. Coxey of Massillon, Ohio, led a march of unemployed workers to Washington to present grievances to Congress. General Coxey and his army of several hundred entered the Capital City on March 25, 1894 and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue. When Coxey and several lieutenants attempted to cross the Capitol lawn to deliver petitions to Congress, they were arrested for walking on the grass. Thereafter the army encamped in Washington waiting for Congress to act on their complaints. By summer, the army was still in the city, but its food and funds had run out. Frank Hume came to the rescue and secured contributions of food, much of it coming from his own grocery business. He also exerted his influence with the railroads to secure train transportation for Coxey's followers to return home. As a result, the army departed Washington in early August, and many members carried baskets of food for their journey courtesy of Hume & Co.

Hume's efforts on behalf of Coxey's Army won him the approbation of all involved. Before departing, the army in an open letter thanked various officials and citizens of the city who had helped them. The letter concluded with the following:

Last, but not least, do we express sincere thanks to the Hon. Frank Hume, through whose influence transportation was secured and our commissary many times replenished when we knew not whence our next meal was to come from . . .

Almost three years later, in February 1897, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, belatedly, voted Frank Hume "their sincere and grateful acknowledgement" for his services to the people of the city at the time of the visit of Coxey's Army.

Hume's concern for the oppressed and needy extended outside of the United States. He sympathized with the Cubans suffering under Spanish
dominion and served as Treasurer of the National Cuban League. When the League ceased to exist, Hume was instrumental in donating the surplus of the treasury, after all claims against the League had been satisfied, for the benefit of sick and wounded Cuban revolutionaries.29

Frank Hume's public and civic interests were not limited solely to matters in the city of Washington. He also took a prominent part in the affairs of Alexandria County and was active in Virginia politics.

In 1886, Hume announced as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the 8th U.S. Congressional District, which at that time included both Alexandria County and City and the counties of Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, King George, Loudoun, Louisa, Orange, Prince William, and Stafford. There were three other contestants for the nomination, including William Henry Fitzhugh ("Rooney") Lee, a son of Robert E. Lee, who lived at Ravensworth in Fairfax County. Lee and Hume represented, to a certain extent, the contrasts of the old and new South. Lee had, of course, an old Virginia name, had been a general in the Confederate Army, and was identified with agricultural interests in the state. Hume, on the other hand, had been only a private in the Confederate Army, had "gone into trade," had the support of labor organizations, and was considered by some to be sympathetic to the Negro. Nonetheless, Hume had the support of Alexandria City and County. In a primary in the City, he won all seventeen delegates; in the County with three delegates, he received two and Lee one.

The nominating convention met in Alexandria City on August 5, 1886, and adopted rules requiring a two-thirds majority for nomination. The voting went on for three days and 164 ballots, but no candidate could muster the required majority. The convention then recessed and reassembled two weeks later, but still no candidate could gain a two-thirds majority. Thereupon the convention adjourned sine die, and the Democratic Committee of the 8th District called for a new selection of delegates and scheduled another convention in Culpeper in September. In the new elections in Alexandria City, Hume again won all the delegates. The second convention at Culpeper adopted rules requiring only a simple majority, and Lee won on the first ballot.30

In 1890, Hume's friends encouraged him to seek the Democratic nomination again. He declined because of irregularities in the selection of delegates and Lee was renominated. Hume did, however, run that year as an independent candidate for Representative from the 8th District. The Republicans did not enter a candidate and gave their support to Frank Hume. Although Hume carried both Alexandria County and City, as well as King George and Stafford Counties, Lee won 13,500 to 10,274.31

While unsuccessful in attempts to win a seat in Congress, Frank Hume was more fortunate in Alexandria County politics. He was appointed on November 13, 1888, to fill a vacancy on the Alexandria County Board of Supervisors, the governing body of the County. He was elected the following year, 1889, as the
Supervisor from Jefferson Magisterial District and was re-elected in 1891 and 1893. He served throughout that period, July 1, 1889 to June 30, 1895, as the Chairman of the Board. He was also elected Delegate from Alexandria County to the General Assembly of the Virginia Legislature in 1889 and again in 1899. In 1896, Frank Hume served on a commission appointed by the Virginia Legislature to purchase land for a courthouse for Alexandria County. Prior to that time, the County had no courthouse of its own and court was held in Alexandria City. A referendum had already selected the general site of Fort Myer Heights (near Wilson Boulevard between Rosslyn and Clarendon). The commission hoped land would be donated. No offers were made, however, and the commission accepted an offer from developers Robinson and Trimmer for the site where the Arlington Court House now stands. The transaction was completed on June 25, 1896 and the new courthouse was dedicated two years later.

Hume's best remembered civic endeavor in Arlington today was his contribution of a portion of the land for the Hume School. The Jefferson District (of Alexandria County) School Board purchased a lot for a school in 1888 on what is now Ridge Road. Frank Hume then deeded the adjacent land for use as a playground and the school building, completed several years later, was named in his honor.

Throughout his life, Frank Hume was extremely interested in his ancestry. The Humes were Scottish. The family immigrant to America, George Hume, son of the laird of Wedderburn, fought in the 1715 Jacobite uprising against Hanoverian rule in Scotland. Upon the failure of that venture, he came to America. He settled in Spottsylvania County, Virginia, and from him Frank Hume was descended. Frank Hume collected books and manuscripts pertaining to his family and paintings and pictures of family sites in Scotland. During the fall of 1900, Hume and his wife traveled to Scotland to see these places. They visited Wedderburn Castle and made the acquaintance of a number of distant relations.

During the last ten years of his life, Frank Hume owned a town house at 1235 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., and he and his family spent the winter months there. Frank Hume died at his Massachusetts Avenue house on July 17, 1906, after an illness of several months. Funeral services were held on July 19 at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension at 12th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. The rector of the Church conducted the service assisted by the Rev. Thomas W. Cooke, the husband of Hume's daughter Alice. Six nephews were pallbearers; two posts of Confederate veterans, the Robert E. Lee Camp of Alexandria and the Robert E. Lee Camp of Washington, provided a bodyguard. Interment was in the Ivy Hill Cemetery in Alexandria and the Confederate veterans gave a last salute.

Frank Hume was a man of many interests. An able merchant, his early business success allowed him the time and resources to participate in civic and
political activities. He joined in founding the Washington Board of Trade and sought the physical improvement of both Washington and Northern Virginia. Two of Hume's efforts in this regard were truly visionary. He worked actively for a memorial bridge across the Potomac to Virginia and a memorial roadway connecting the capital city with Mount Vernon. Although neither project came to fruition in Hume's lifetime, both were completed in the Twentieth Century for the benefit of area residents as well as the many tourists who visit the city. Hume's interests extended beyond those of the usual prosperous merchant of the late 19th Century. His concern for social welfare matters was demonstrated in his assistance to Coxey's Army and his efforts for enactment of a pure food law — a measure that would regulate his own business.

Frank Hume's civic activities in Arlington were many. He served as a member of the County Board of Supervisors, as Chairman of that body, and as a member of the Virginia Legislature. When he gave land for use with a school in Arlington, which was subsequently named for him, he stipulated that the land should revert to him or his heirs if the school ceased to be used for educational purposes. In 1956, Arlington County gave up the Hume School and, at that time, the Hume heirs continued Frank Hume's tradition of civic generosity and donated the land for use with the Hume School building as the Museum of the Arlington Historical Society. As a result, Frank Hume's original gift continues to benefit Arlington and its citizens.
FOOTNOTES

1 Alexandria Gazette, 17 July 1906, p. 3. This obituary of Hume states that he worked in the store of "Mr. Male," but no such establishment is listed in the Washington Directories for the period 1856-1860.


4 Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser, 14 August 1899, p. 2.

5 Washington Directories, 1868-1871.


9 Market Space was a small street that extended from 7th to 9th Streets, N.W., just to the north of Pennsylvania Avenue; number 807 was at the corner of Market Space and 8th Street.


11 Washington Directories, 1878-1906. The Hume family continued to own and operate Hume & Co. at 454 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., until 1929. Hume's sons Frank Norris Hume and Robert Scott Hume served as President and Treasurer, respectively. See Washington Directories, 1907-1930.


13 The portion of Alexandria County (subsequently renamed Arlington) where Warwick was located was annexed by Alexandria City in 1929. See C.B. Rose, Jr., Arlington County, Virginia, A History (1976), p. 171-172. The house at Warwick burned in 1921, was rebuilt, and finally demolished in the 1950's to make way for the Warwick Village development. See Eleanor Lee Templeman and Nan Netherton, Northern Virginia Heritage (1966), p. 48.


15 Sesquicentennial Souvenir of Alexandria, Va. (1899), copy in the Archives of the Arlington Historical Society. Three of the cannons were given by the Hume family to the County and are now on the grounds of the Arlington Courthouse. See Eleanor Lee Templeman, Arlington Heritage (1959), p. 48.


17 Washington Board of Trade, Annual Reports, 1890-1907.

18 For background on the Mount Vernon Avenue Association as well as the proposed avenue, see "Mount Vernon Avenue," in Souvenir Sesquicentennial of Alexandria, Va., (1899); Mount Vernon Avenue Association Brochure, "Mt Vernon Avenue," undated; copies of both in the Archives of the Arlington Historical Society. Rose, Arlington County, Virginia, p. 190-191.

19 Washington Board of Trade, First Annual Report, 10 November 1890.
See Rose, Arlington County, Virginia, p. 188.

Washington Board of Trade, Annual Reports, 1890-1903.

All further information on Hume's activities connected with the Washington Board of Trade as well as the activities of the Board itself in this period is from the Washington Board of Trade, Annual Reports, 1890-1907. Upon Hume’s death, the Vice Chairman of the Bridges Committee, Alvin M. Lothrop (of Woodward & Lothrop) succeeded Hume as Chairman of the Committee. Lothrop, who had purchased the John Febrey farm in Arlington (the house survives at the corner of Wilson Boulevard and McKinley Street) in the 1890’s, continued to press for a memorial bridge.


Food and Drug Act, 30 June 1906, 34 Stat. 768.

Tyler, Men of Mark in Virginia, p. 205.

For a detailed account of Coxey’s army, see Donald L. McMurray, Coxey’s Army, A Study of the Industrial Movement of 1894 (Boston, 1929). One of Coxey’s proposals was for the employment of jobless workers in public works projects building roads. It is interesting to speculate that Hume might have assisted Coxey’s army as a possible means of building the Mount Vernon Avenue. No documentation was found, however, to confirm this idea.

McMurray, Coxey’s Army, p. 257-258. The Commissioners’ letter is quoted in Tyler, Men of Mark in Virginia, p. 206.

Tyler, Men of Mark in Virginia, p. 207.

For a detailed account of the 8th District Democratic Conventions of 1886, see Margaret Birge (Frank Hume’s granddaughter) and C.B. Rose, Jr., “Democratic Politics in the 8th District of Virginia,” Arlington Historical Magazine (1970), p. 3-21.


Rose, Arlington County, Virginia, p. 142—144.


Washington Directories, 1896-1906. Tyler, Men of Mark in Virginia, p. 207