

[Public School Teachers]

February 14, 1939

Junius Allison (white)

#20 Law Building,

College Street,

Asheville, N. C.

Public-school teacher.

Anne Winn Stevens, writer.

Douglas Carter, reviser.

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS Original Names Changed Names

Junius Allison George Anderson

Knoxville Hittsville

Kress and Co. Raft Co.

Riceville Wheatville

Parson Rice "Parson" Wheat

[Swannanoa?] Riverdale

Mr. Pender Mr. Parker C9 — N.C. Box 1-

Library of Congress

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

“When I was graduated from college in 1932,” said George Anderson as he leaned back in his office chair, “I was not planning to teach.”

“What were your plans at that time?” I inquired.

“Well, that’s somewhat of a story. Law would have been my choice if I had had the means to continue my studies. Indeed, I had chosen the prelaw course at college, was president of the Prewlaw Club in my senior year, and debated whenever I had the opportunity. But you may remember that money was scarce in 1932.”

“Only too well,” I murmured.

“Such being the case, I decided to go into business. I was one of two students chosen from the senior class to be trained in Hittsville as future managers in the stores of Raft Co.”

On the strength of that prospect, George immediately

2

Public-school teachers.

on his graduation was married in Hittsville to the dark, slim, capable girl who as a senior in the same college had edited the college newspaper, for which George, then a junior, was a contributor. During George's senior year, she taught in a small mountain school nearby.

“Modern” in their attitude toward marriage, they planned for separate careers until George should receive a salary that they considered adequate for building a home and raising a family. Accordingly, after a brief honeymoon, the [bride?] returned to her mountain school, for her position continued during the summer, while George embarked on his job at Raft's.

He had contracted to receive \$20 a week, and was set to work in the warehouse.

Library of Congress

"I was paid \$20 at the end of the first week," said George, "but never again during the summer. The second week I received \$18."

"Were you told why?" I asked.

"Employees were not allowed to ask questions," he replied.

"My work at Raft's," continued George, "began at seven o'clock in the morning and lasted until 10 or 11 at night. There was much heavy lifting to do. The shelves in the warehouse had to be kept in perfect order. Baskets

3

Public-school teachers.

had to be loaded until late at night and sent to the several departments for the girls to unload and put into place, either at night or early in the morning."

George lost weight steadily. From 166 pounds, he went down to 146, and continued to lose. With his heavy schedule, his weekend reunions with his wife were necessarily brief. Sunday was their only free day. Thus the summer wore on. Then came the field inspector from headquarters.

"The inspector was brisk, suave, but hard as nails," said George. "The employees were in deadly fear of him. When he had examined all of the departments, he invited the employees to make suggestions and offer criticisms. They, in dread of losing their jobs, expressed themselves as well pleased with the system as it was."

But not so George. "At that time," he declares, "I was in sympathy with labor. I told the inspector that I thought the working hours were entirely too long."

Library of Congress

After the inspector had gone, the manager sent for George. "The inspector told me to tell you," he said briskly, "that if you wish to remain in the Raft system you must change your views."

When George conveyed this information to his wife, she was indignant with the system, but maintained that their plans were merely deferred. She had been offered a school

4

Public-school teachers.

for the fall. [?] George had no intention of changing his views [.] "At the end of three months," he declared, "I quit that warehouse job, and came home to my father and stepmother for a needed rest."

About that time an aunt in the North urged him to come there with a prospect of obtaining a scholarship in a law school. "I don't know why she thought I could get it," he said. "Anyhow, I didn't get it, and found myself dead broke."

Again he sought a job at Raft's, and was given a warehouse job there. He was careful not to mention his experience in Hittsville. In his new job he found the working hours somewhat fewer, and the work in the warehouse less arduous. He was allowed, too, to spend part of his time dressing windows. "But I didn't want to spend my life at that kind of work," he remarked, "so at the end of three weeks, having saved up money enough to get home on, I quit."

When George announced his decision, the manager said to him, "You've worked at Raft's before?"

"How did you know?" asked George.

Library of Congress

“Oh, by a phrase you used when off guard. You know, of course, that it's against our rules to employ any worker

5

Public-school teachers.

who has been dismissed from any one of the Raft stores?”

“I suppose,” said George, “that the manager of the store did not enforce the rule at once because he was from another southern State. Up there, southerners usually stand by one another.”

When George returned home, a friend told him, “There's a vacancy in the seventh grade of the consolidated school. Why don't you apply for it?”

George applied. Being a graduate of the same high school, and somewhat of a favorite there, he was elected at once. His salary was \$72 a month for eight months. An attack of appendicitis and a consequent operation interfered with his first year's teachings and practically ate up his salary. But he was re-elected.

To secure a teacher's certificate, and so hold his position, it was stipulated that he must spend the summer at a summer school to acquire the necessary credits in education, a subject that had not intrigued him when he was in college. These credits he got near home in the summer school of the nearby normal college.

After teaching three years in the seventh grade, George was transferred to the department of social sciences in the high school. After seven years' teaching, his salary is

6

Public-school teachers.

Library of Congress

now \$113 a month for eight months. Having been reared in an environment similar to that of his pupils and their parents, he understands their prejudices and taboos, avoids offending them, and is quite popular as a teacher, and quite thorough.

Meanwhile, his wife secured a position as teacher of French and English in the high school of a consolidated school in another part of the county. As their respective positions are only 20 miles apart, they could at [least?] live together during the school year, as well as during the summer vacations. They took, therefore, a small apartment at the county seat, and set up light housekeeping.

"I got breakfast , " said George. "It was chiefly toast and coffee. Mrs. Anderson prepared dinner, except when she had to stay late at school directing extracurricular activities. At such times we went to dinner at a neighboring boardinghouse or at a cafeteria."

After their seven o'clock breakfast, George rattled off in his ancient Ford coupe eastward to his school, and his wife joined some of the other teachers who motored westward to hers. Their brief luncheons they snatched at the school cafeterias.

"Mrs. Anderson makes a better salary than I do."

7

Public-school teachers.

George admitted sheepishly. "She gets \$5 more a month. Her salary is now \$118."

George's early life was spent at the little settlement of Wheatville, near his school. Due to the efforts of "Parson" Wheat, an Episcopal clergyman from a mountain family, a man of native intelligence, [?] fair education, and some culture, Wheatville was somewhat better than the average mountain settlement of the early 20th century. George's mother numbered "Parson" Wheat among her friends, and was a member of the Wheatville

Library of Congress

Episcopal Church. She was a chronic invalid, and died when George was fifteen. "My brother and I," said George, "did most of the housekeeping."

Their father was a carpenter and a small farmer, but after the establishment of the large hospital nearby, he secured work there as a warehouse keeper, a job he still holds.

George's early education was obtained in a two-teacher school at Wheatville. The school building was crude, the term six months, and the teachers mere high-school graduates, or less. One teacher had completed only the ninth grade! The year that George completed the seventh grade, the school was consolidated with the public school at Riverdale.

8

Public-school teachers.

There George completed his high school course, his outstanding achievement being that of becoming business manager of the school newspaper.

Meanwhile, his family at Wheatville was being held together by his paternal grandmother, whom George calls "The Matriarch." He has written a story about her and her activities, but so far has not been able to market it. "She was truly a remarkable woman," he says, "ruling my father and my uncles who lived on neighboring farms. The whole family revolved about her. She did the bossing, and she did it well. In sickness, she was more in demand than the country doctor, treating the sick with old-fashioned remedies, delivering babies, and diagnosing diseases. After her death, the house ran down and fell apart."

The main recreations of the Wheatville community in his boyhood consisted of "church socials, corn shuckings, and bean stringings." The bean stringings were conducted as follows: The young people were invited to some house in the neighborhood. When they arrived, they found the beans piled in heaps on clean sheets on the floor. They then snapped the beans into appropriate lengths amid jokes, laughter, and refreshments. Later the beans were

Library of Congress

9

Public-school teachers.

strung on cords and hung to dry on the outer walls of the house. When dried, they were put away for winter use. George says, "They were delicious when they were properly cooked. The local name for them was 'leather britches.'"

His high school course completed in 1928, George attended a junior college, then located near the county seat. As there was no boarding department, he, in a Ford car of ancient model, rattled back and forth from day to day. He became business manager of the college newspaper, editor of the literary magazine, and a leader in debating clubs. "In fact," he said, "I did everything but study." Having graduated from this junior college two years later, he entered the junior class of a standard college in an adjoining State.

During his course at the junior college, he spent his vacations working at a grocery store at \$4.50 a week. "Work began at eight in the morning," declared George, "and ended whenever Mr. Parker, the owner of the grocery, saw fit to close. He frequently kept the store open until 11 o'clock at night. I had to stand so long that my feet swelled until I found it almost impossible to remove my shoes. That was at first. Later I got used to standing for long hours."

10

Public-school teachers.

Today, as high-school teachers, both of the Andersons find that their working hours frequently outlast the customary closing time of 3:15.

"Mrs. Anderson's extra hours," said George, "seem limitless. She teaches English and French, has charge of the school library, coaches class plays and pageants, arranges class socials, receptions, and banquets; directs a literary society, coaches the girls' basketball team, and accompanies the team as chaperons when they take part in

Library of Congress

athletic contests at other schools. This is all in the day's work. She receives no extra compensation." Also, she manages to keep her trim, chic appearance, always dressing stylishly, though simply and inexpensively.

George, in addition to his regular school duties, is business manager of the athletic association, coaches debates, and belongs to and takes part in various local organizations. When the high school gives entertainments in the evenings, he frequently must return to take tickets at the door, or to take part in the program.

As state chairman of the legislative committee of the Classroom Teachers Association, he has been active in urging its four-point program, namely, (1) restoration of teachers' salaries to pre-depression levels, (2) a retirement fund

11

Public-school teachers.

for teachers, (3) addition of a 12th grade to the public schools, and (4) tenure of teachers.

He now has an office near the courthouse, and keeps office hours on afternoons, Saturdays, and during summer vacations, having taken and passed the bar examinations some two years ago. He took his law course at a night school during the previous two years, and paid the tuition fees by acting as correspondent for local newspapers.

"So far," he admitted, "I have handled only civil cases: damage suits and the like. What I have made in my law practice barely pays my office rent and incidental expenses."

Recently the Andersons found it necessary to give up their apartment. "With all the extra work Mrs. Anderson has to do at school," said George, "the trips back and forth were too much of a strain on her physically. Besides, neither of us had the time necessary for efficient housekeeping. So we found a pleasant boarding house near Mrs. Anderson's school. Boarding, we find, is less expensive than keeping house."

Library of Congress

So, after seven years of teaching, the Andersons are no nearer the realization of their early hopes of maintaining their own home. Their pleasures are few and simple: attending a motion picture occasionally, a game

12

Public-school teachers.

of cards with friends, a group discussion of recent books, a concert when some especially fine musician visits the city.

George, however, hopes to establish himself in his law practice, and dreams of a diplomatic position in South America. "But if the trustees of the school knew of that," he grinned, "they would probably disapprove."

"You find your students, I presume, eager and thirsting for knowledge?" I asked, remembering sundry articles I had read in magazines that publish stories of mountain life.

"Here is your answer," he laughed, pulling from a drawer an object the size and shape of a baseball. It was made up of scores of rubber bands, tightly wound. "I have another, equally large, at school."

"What on earth?" I queried.

"These," he said impressively, "I have collected during study periods. The high school students use them to shoot paper wads, peas, pins, matches, and the like, particularly when they are supposed to be reading in the library."

"What remedy would you suggest to stimulate their interest in school work," I continued.

Library of Congress

“More vocational subjects,” he rejoined, “in all public schools: agriculture, commerce, mechanics, and, of course, home economics for the girls. Perhaps, if the schools add a 12th grade, this would be the next step.”