

# HISTORY MAKER

## BOWMAN GRAY SR.

**Born:** May 1, 1874, in Winston

**Died:** July 7, 1935, at sea near North Cape in the Arctic Circle

**Known for:** President and chairman of the board for RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company and philanthropist who, among other gifts, made a bequest that funded the establishment of the medical school that today bears his name

Bowman Gray Sr. is credited with the growth of RJ Reynolds from the fourth largest tobacco company in the country to the largest. Handpicked by RJ Reynolds himself to head the company's finance division in 1912, Bowman was promoted to president of the company in 1924 and oversaw construction of the iconic 22-story Reynolds Building, completed in 1929.

At 51, he was reported to have paid the second highest income tax in North Carolina, second only to his predecessor as president of Reynolds, Will Reynolds. A devout Methodist, he supported hospitals, orphanages, and educational efforts throughout his life.

Perhaps most notably, he made a provision in his will for \$750,000 of his RJR stock to "be used for a cause beneficial to the community." His family decided to use that bequest to entice Wake Forest College to relocate its medical school to Winston-Salem and expand it to a four-year program. They partnered with NC Baptist Hospital to create the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, which opened in 1941.

Bowman was the third of six children born to Wachovia Bank co-founder James A. Gray and his wife Aurelia (Bowman) Gray. He attended Winston schools and studied for a year at UNC-Chapel Hill before returning to Winston, where he worked as a teller at Wachovia Bank with his father and grandfather.

RJ Reynolds was impressed with the young man who took his deposits, according to Bowman's grandson Lyons Gray, and recruited him to become a tobacco salesman to "open up the northern territories" in 1895. Early on, Reynolds didn't promise much -- according to the family story, he said, "I can't pay you anything, but I can give you some stock. It's not worth much."

Bowman remained on the board of directors with Wachovia until his death, but he worked at RJR from that point on. And the stock was eventually worth millions.

He served on a state-wide committee to direct how a \$40,000 grant to help disabled veterans and orphans of the



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first World War was used. He built a manor house he called Graylyn next to Reynolda House that was completed in 1932. He donated his home on Fifth Street to Centenary Methodist Church. During the Depression, he paid for the education of several families who lost money.

Continuing his legacy, the family donated Graylyn to Wake Forest University, where it serves as a conference center for the medical school.