

## THE TWO THOMAS L. JOHNSTONS

Thomas Lynn Johnston was a native of Lincolnton, N. C., a descendant of two colonial governors and a graduate of Univ. of N. C. and Louisville Medical College. In 1852 he married Miss Dorcas Luckey of Pineville, N. C. who had inherited several scattered plantations and a large number of slaves. She had no experience in plantation management so Dr. Johnston proposed to sell the Mecklenburg land and find a single large plantation.

The plantation he found was in Lancaster District's Indian Land township directly across the river from the Catawba Indian reservation. He built a large home about a mile above the present village of Van Wyck. He farmed what was known as the Kings Bottoms, a strip of rich river bottom land where the Catawbas in the days of King Hagler had headquartered.

Dr. Johnston was popular and was soon elected to the House of Representatives. When the Civil War broke out he volunteered as a private and surgeon in Capt. John D. Wylie's Lancaster Grays. He was surgeon for over 500 men.

Dr. Johnston had a wife, 2 daughters (Madge and Annie or "Jenks") and a son that he did not see until the war was over. The story was told that when the doctor returned, his 6-year-old son, Tom, was aghast to see the strange man kissing his mother.

When Tom Johnston, was 10 years old, Dr. Johnston moved his family to Rock Hill to send the children to school. The doctor built a cottage on what is now Johnston Street in downtown Rock Hill. The son was later to build a mansion (still standing) on the same spot.

Tom attended Davidson college for two years but dropped out because of his father's health. Dr. Johnston died in May 1879.

Tom Johnston clerked for two years in Allen & Barber, a general merchandise store. Then, at the age of 21 or 22 he joined the firm of W. L. Roddey & Sons, first as the cashier of Roddey's First National Bank and then as a cotton buyer. For a time he bought cotton for Leroy Springs of Lancaster. He married Miss Daisy Donnell of Greensboro, N. C.

Soon everyone in town knew that Johnston was an "up-and-comer." He accumulated a large acreage and sold his cotton through the cotton brokerage, T. L. Johnston Cotton Co. He financed his operations through his own banks. He was president of People's Trust Co., later People's National Bank. He was also president of Mechanics, Federal Savings & Loan Association.

Johnston was anxious to improve the quality of cotton. To get his message to local farmers that good quality cotton grew from quality cotton seed, he personally conducted tours of Coker Seed Co. of Hartsville, S. C. and saw to it that the farmers planted Coker seed. His office door was always open to farmers. In many ways, Johnston was a county agricultural agent long before such an office was created by the federal government. Before Clemson College existed, T. L. Johnston was teaching farmers how to improve their soil.

Johnston was primarily responsible for setting up the Fishing Creek Soil Conservation Demonstration Area. He was instrumental in securing an agriculture teacher for Rock Hill High School. Tom Johnston Civilian Conservation Corps in Ebenezer was named in his honor.

Farmers appreciated Johnston's "courteous dignity" and sense of humor. One of Johnston's interests was "putting afflicted children on their feet enabling them to make a living for themselves instead of being in the care of relatives."

As a boy, Tom Johnston had often ridden with his father when he visited the sick and afflicted. He never forgot those excursions.

Johnston had an intense interest in plant life in general, not just in farm crops. He once remarked that he would gladly ride 200 miles to see one Venus Fly Trap in bloom.

Johnston died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 78.