

Greece's 'Mr. Jimmy' lived American Dream in Rock Hill

More odds and ends:
 ■ Demetrios James Dionisopulos came to Rock Hill around 1910 or 1911. He didn't have "a nickel in his pocket, and his spirits were very low," Winthrop student Carolyn Parker wrote years later.

Winthrop students called him "Mr. Jimmy" and frequented his Rock Hill Fruit and Candy Co. His immaculate shop offered fountain drinks, sand-

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

wiches, ice cream sodas, Arctic bars, freshly made candy and little paper cartons of strawberries with whipped cream on top — all made from scratch.

At first Dionisopulos was only an employee. The pay was low, and he once left to work in Charlotte. He returned in a few months. The owners of the fruit and candy company sold only fruit, fruit salad and candy.

Gradually, Dionisopulos bought a share of the company. He started with a one-third ownership but eventually became the owner of a business worth \$50,000, an impressive sum in the 1920s. He said it took 14 years to add enough variety to attract large numbers of students and other Rock Hillians.

Jimmy Dionisopulos was born in Messinia, Greece, in 1888. When he was 14, his godfather, owner of a fruit and candy shop in Athens, got sick. He summoned Jimmy to Athens to work in the store.

Jimmy was restless, however. Many Greeks were emigrating to America, and the boy decided to go. He landed in New York without a coat, shocked to find New York much colder than Athens. He found work and earned enough to get to St. Louis, where he spent

eight years but held no job for longer than six months.

Friends had moved to Rock Hill and wrote him to join them. Dionisopulos told the student interviewer, "I thought I was in a penitentiary at first: no money, no people, no places to go for enjoyment, but Dr. Johnson changed my mind." (Dionisopulos was referring to Winthrop College's founder and president for 42 years, David Bancroft Johnson.)

Dionisopulos recalled that Johnson came to the shop one day and shook his hand, saying how glad he was Dionisopulos had come to Rock Hill and hoping he would stay.

From that moment, Dionisopulos said, "Everything I have is Rock Hill's and Winthrop College's; it was Dr. Johnson that changed my mind."

■ In March 1907 a railroad freight car jumped the track at Rock Hill's Southern passenger station and crashed into the overhanging roof.

This was not the first such incident. Locals blamed the accidents on the miserable state of the roadbed and the railroad's being "too cheap" to repair it properly.

Two days before the passenger

station was hit, 28 railway cars sitting on a spur track near Rock Hill's Arcade Cotton Mill came loose and gathered speed on a heavy grade about three-quarters of a mile long. The runaway cars, many loaded with lumber, dashed into two cars standing near the mill, ran over the heavy guard and brought up against the loom room of the mill, tearing up the corner of the mill.

■ Around 1912, a group of Fort Mill citizens began talking of seceding from York County and joining Mecklenburg. They admitted to probably would be impossible to change the state line but believed they were unfairly taxed by York County.

One dissident said, "Across the river seems like a foreign country, as compared with Mecklenburg County. (Fort Mill) people are bowed down under heavy taxation and reckless appropriations, and the tax rate of Mecklenburg which is 75 percent less, appeals mightily, as well as the good roads and other good things it (Mecklenburg) has accomplished."

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 Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.

CORRECTION

Last week's Louise Pettus column in the York section contained two errors. Madge and Annie Johnston were granddaughters of Thomas Lynn Johnston, not his daughters. In addition, the column incorrectly said the Johnston house on Johnston Street is still standing.