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By Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1988

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Elizabeth Johnston Evans Johnston, philanthropist, was born at Blandwood in Greensboro [2], the daughter of Peter G. Evans and his wife Eliza, who was the daughter of Governor John M. Morehead. Known throughout life as "Johnsie," the name given her by her father, she spent her early years at Beechwood, the Evans plantation near New Bern. During the Civil War Peter Evans, as colonel of the Sixty-third North Carolina Regiment (Cavalry), was gravely wounded in a charge at the Battle of Upperville [3], Va., on 21 June 1863 and died shortly afterwards in a prison hospital in Washington, D.C. When Colonel Evans had gone off to war, his young daughter had given him a silver cup bearing her name. Fifty years later, this relic was returned to her by E. P. Worcester, an old soldier in Los Angeles, who, as a private in the First Maine Cavalry, had found the cup on the battlefield.

After the death of her father, Elizabeth lived at her grandfather's home in Greensboro and was educated by tutors. On 1 Nov. 1871, at age twenty, she married General Robert Daniel Johnston [4], a Confederate hero and fourteen years her senior. The couple settled in Charlotte [5], where he practiced law and she was instrumental in the establishment of a hospital for blacks. In 1887, R. D. Johnston accepted the presidency of the Birmingham National Bank and the family moved to Alabama.

Soon after settling into their new home, the Johnstons engaged a tutor to prepare their oldest son, Gordon, for Princeton [6]. The tutor conducted a Sunday school at the Pratt mines, operated by convicts, and began to take his charge with him. They were eventually joined by Mrs. Johnston, who became interested in the religious instruction of the prisoners. The plight of the younger convicts engaged her particular attention, and she conceived the idea of establishing a boys' training school for youthful offenders. Through her untiring efforts, a bill was passed by the Alabama legislature and the Alabama Boy's Industrial School was opened on 21 June 1900. It was said to be the first altruistic state institution of its kind and was unusual in that the board of managers was to be composed entirely of women. Under Mrs. Johnson's interest and guidance the school prospered, and for the rest of her life she was chairman of the board of managers. Her success with the training school was noted in her native state of North Carolina, which invited her to address the legislature on how it might establish a similar institution. In 1922 she was awarded a silver loving cup by the *Birmingham News* for her philanthropy.

With her appointment in 1901 as vice-regent of Alabama for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association [7], Mrs. Johnston devoted the same energy to the preservation of the home of George Washington as she did to her school. She is said to have had an unusual ability to find Washington relics and was responsible for fourteen of these being placed in the mansion, including Washington's camp bed and the sash worn by General Edward Braddock in his last battle and given to his aide, Washington.

In her later years Mrs. Johnston lived in a house the Highland Book Club had built for her on the grounds of the Alabama Boy's Industrial School. She named it "Little Mount Vernon" and filled it with mementos of her career as vice-regent. After her death, the building became the school's library. Just before her eightieth birthday, the Alabama legislature passed a resolution to express the state's gratitude for her work in establishing the training school. Her success in public endeavors was said to have been due to her speaking ability and her great personal charm.

R. D. Johnston died many years before his wife. They had three sons—Gordon, Robert, and Evans—and four daughters—Elizabeth Evans (m. Maxwell Berry of Atlanta), Nancy Forney (m. Harvey Skey of Canada), Eugenia (m. William Eager of Birmingham), and Letitia (m. L. G. Firth of Pittsburgh). Mrs. Johnston died shortly after the death of her oldest son.

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