

Johnson, Norman Huff ^[1]

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by J. Marshall Bullock, 1988

24 Sept. 1880–5 June 1943

Norman Huff Johnson, lawyer and economist, was born in Warrenton, the son of Edward Alston and Geneva Huff Johnson. He attended public schools and the Warrenton Academy before reading law under Judge Charles A. Cook ^[2] and Benjamin G. Green. Johnson was a student at Wake Forest College ^[3] from 1899 to 1900, when he received his license to practice law.

In 1901 Johnson was elected city attorney of Burlington, and in the course of his duties led the organization of the first retail merchants association to exchange credit information in the state in 1902. His similar efforts in several other cities resulted in 1903 in the formation of the North Carolina Retail Merchants Association ^[4], of which Johnson was elected attorney general. In 1904 he moved to Raleigh and established the *Merchants Journal*, a mercantile trade paper that was later merged with several others to form the *Merchants Journal and Commerce*, which had a wide circulation in the South. Johnson was a lobbyist for trade interests in the state legislature, successfully working for the repeal of unjust mercantile taxes and railroad freight regulations and for the passage of the bulk sales laws and the Pure Food law. In 1908 he was elected general counsel for the National Retail Merchants Association but declined the position to devote himself to his trade paper.

In 1913 Johnson moved the paper to Richmond, Va., and the next year he was elected general counsel and secretary of the Southern Wholesale Dry Goods Association, serving until its dissolution in 1928. Considered an expert on southern merchandising, he was under contract to the Thomas Brady Speakers' Bureau of New York City as the highest paid speaker on topics such as business, salesmanship, and advertising in the United States. During World War I he was also a noted speaker on government war projects.

In April 1941, Johnson was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the gun slaying of his black hired hand and of possessing an illegal distillery. As the shooting was evidently in self-defense, he received only a two-year sentence which was suspended after the judge received a petition calling for suspension signed by sixty-nine of Johnson's neighbors.

Johnson married Alice Bouchillon Baird of Charlotte in 1906 and had two children: Norman Huff, Jr., and Martha Bouchillon. He was an Episcopalian ^[5] and a Mason ^[6]. He died in Richmond where he was buried in Oakdale Cemetery.

References:

Correspondence of John T. Church, November 1977, and Mrs. John Kerr, Jr., September 1977 (in the author's possession).

Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, 9 Apr., 4 Sept. 1941, 5 June 1943.

Charles L. Van Noppen Papers (Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham).

Additional Resources:

North Carolina General Assembly. "A joint resolution honoring the memory of Norman H. Johnson, the first attorney general of the North Carolina Retail Merchants Association, on the one hundredth anniversary of the North Carolina Retail Merchants Association." North Carolina General Assembly. 2002.

<https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Resolutions/HTML/2001-2002/Res2002-1.html> ^[7] (accessed May 21, 2014).

"Among the Alumni." *Bulletin of Wake Forest College* 10, no. 3 (October 1915). 182.

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