

James Madison (Jimmie) Stephenson

Birth: 29 OCT 1841 in Near Lithonia, DeKalb Co., GA Death: 8 MAY 1925 in Carrollton, Carroll Co., GA

Father of Mell Manly Stephenson

"The Teacher" Jim was born in De Kalb County about a mile South of Lithonia on his grandfather Stephenson's homeplace, and was six years old when his parents moved to Carroll County, Georgia. When he was 1 1 years old, "white swelling" developed following an injury to his knee. For more than a year he was bed-ridden and when he recovered he was left with a stiff knee. Partly because of this handicap, he was somewhat spoiled by the age of 12 and without ambition. But one night during a visit of his uncle "Happy Jim's, he listened to a discussion of possibilities for his future with a stiff leg, while all supposed him to be sleeping peacefully. His father said, "I don't know what we will try to make of him. I am not able to educate him." And then in a laughing way said, 'I guess we will have to make a saddle-maker of him". These words stung Jim and he said to himself over and over, "I won't be a saddle-maker! " Right then the desire for an education was born and this desire became his determination and obsession.

Determined to never again make any excuse or complaint about his stiff leg, Jim began walking five miles daily to Bowden College, where he cut wood, made fires, swept floors and brought water to pay his tuition. This continued until the war closed Bowden along with most Southern Colleges. Jim volunteered for service in the War Between the States, but was rejected on account of the stiff knee. However he served where he could, taking food to soldiers in camp, and he was always invited to Soldiers Reunions after the war.

Jim returned to Bowdon College about 1868, now teaching during summer school and also between sessions to pay his tuition. Some of his Bowden essays were, "Life" in which he described three distinct phases, "Propriety", "Was Lucretia Justified in Committing suicide?", "Cyrus, Medes and Persians, and "Essay on the First Satire of Horace. Towards his last months at Bowden he borrowed money to finish, taking life insurance to repay the debt in case death should intervene.

Jim graduated with A.B. degree in 1870 and at once went to teaching to pay back the debt. His first teaching position was near Lithonia, where he met Dora Weaver, a young lady of remarkable beauty, about July of 1870. She

was Jim's pupil at school and he was a boarder in her mother's house. Dora called him "Jack" and "Jimmie". The Fall of 1871, while teaching at Oxford College, he proposed and Dora accepted, all by correspondence. They were married that year during the Christmas holidays. After their marriage he did post-graduate work at the University of Georgia, Athens while Dora stayed briefly in Lithonia. He became an honored member of the University of Georgia Alumni Association.

After teaching two years at Granger College, Jacksonville, AL, in 1878 he moved to Oxford, AL, with his family to teach at Oxford College, where for seventeen years he was professor of Mathematics, French and German. Differential and Integral Calculus were toys in his hand.

In 1895 the family moved by covered wagon, fording the rivers to GA, where Jim was next teacher and principal of several secondary schools. In 1897 he began two years as Principal of Ragan Institute at Jersey, GA, near Social Circle, then was Superintendent of Public Schools at Commerce, GA. for four years. He next taught two years at Grangers College, Jacksonville, Alabama followed by four years at Bowden College, where he was Associate President when he retired in 1910. After sixty years in the teaching profession his pupils were numbered by the thousands. Among them were many men and women who occupied prominent walks in life, many preachers, teachers, lawyers and Congressmen, and a vast host who held humbler but no less useful places in life. At the time of his death, he was Superintendent of Elberton Public Schools. Dora also taught in the literary schools of two states.

Upon retirement from Bowden College, Jim moved to Carrolton and built his home there. The timber for that house was cut from the best old growth long leaf pines that could be found still growing on the place his father bought in 1848. (He had so much love and sentiment for his boyhood home that, in the 1917 settlement of his fathers estate, he bought the interests of the other heirs.) There was a sort of halo about that house he built for his old age -- as though it were a part of himself. His house has now been demolished and replaced, but its address was 14 Longview Street, opposite the City Park. In retirement there, he was never without private pupils whom he coached for special work.

He would often walk the distance from Carrolton to Bowden College in his retirement years. Dora kept busy raising a flock of up to 51 chickens and

gardening.

In this house, Jim and Dora, held their "Golden Wedding" Anniversary on August 6 and 7, 1921. It was a gala occasion, with Mrs. Beavers and Miss Dorothy Watkins presiding at the punch bowl; Miss Ruby Burns and Miss Mildred Stephenson at the registration desk. Their son, Mell M. Stephenson was master of ceremonies and toastmaster. Also attending were sons, G.F., and G.B. Stephenson and daughters, Mesdames M.L. Watkins, T.J. Jones, E.L. Shelnett and Mrs. J.M. Stephenson, also grandchildren, Mr. and Mrs. Sumner J. Smith, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Jack Stephenson, Miss Elizabeth Stephenson, Miss Dorothy Watkins, Mell and Mildred Stephenson, Margaret Jones, Ruth, Hazel, Virginia and Charlotte Shelnett and one great grandchild, Robert Smith. Also an additional 31 guests came to offer their good wishes.

James was a Christian from his early youth. His religion was very real to him. The Bible was a genuine lamp for his feet and prayer a privilege he did not neglect. He was a man of sterling character, truth was his watchword and honesty the keystone of his life. His strict adherence to his lofty ideals were an inspiration to his pupils and his children. Dora and Jim were members of the Carrollton First Baptist Church, where both taught Sunday School and Jim sometimes filled the pulpit. Jim was a member of Mt. Vernon Masonic Lodge.

Jim was run over by a car April 26th, 1925. His ankle was injured, his arm slashed and he was injured internally about the heart. The ankle and arm injuries were healing beautifully and he seemed much better and in cheerful spirits when the end came suddenly on May 8 from the internal injury. He was buried in the Carrollton City Cemetery, Row 5, section C near the western cemetery boundary.

After Jim's death Dora lived with daughter Virginia in Keysville, VA. There she was a proud member of the Simon T. Walton Chapter, Daughters of the Confederacy, and at their meetings recounted many of her vivid memories of the war, which she did with much interest and wit. Dora also was active in the Ash Camp Baptist Church, where she attended Sunday School on the day of her death. After five years in Keysville, Dora died of a sudden heart attack and was buried beside Jim in the Carrollton cemetery.