

EDGEFIELD GOVERNORS

Sketches of Nine Chief Executives of South Carolina and Five Lieutenant Governors.

By Miss Hortense Woodson.

J. C. SHEPPARD.

Edgefield—John Calhoun Sheppard began his political career during the Reconstruction era following the Confederate war. Says Curran Hartley Feltham in reference to this period of the state's history:

"The echo of the surrender at Appomattox came with reverberating dismay to a people whose will had never been brooked. The feet that had trodded the flower-strewn paths of Eden were abruptly turned into Gethsemane. The natures that had rivalled the eagle's in freedom were to feel all the humility of captivity. But only for a short duration: did Edgefield's spirit submit to injustice. With the all powerful force of water seeking its level, the people threw off the lethargy of their shock and Phoenix-like there arose a new order of things from the ashes of a dead past. Gone were the luxuries of slave holding aristocrats, but in their place came the blessings of arduous tasks well done. The spirit of democracy usurped the terets of autocracy. Edgefield went through the crucible of fire and came out as refined gold."

In the "Wallace House" of 1876 was a young man of flashing eye and courtly bearing—John Calhoun Sheppard—whose name was destined to be linked with the political history of the state during the next 16 years. The speaker of the house was Gen. William H. Wallace, later to become Mr. Sheppard's father-in-law, and it was a distinct recognition of the ability of the younger man that he was elected speaker upon the resignation of General Wallace. As speaker of the house he made an enviable reputation for himself as a presiding officer.

John C. Sheppard was born July 5, 1850, at Liberty Hill in Edgefield county, the son of James Sheppard and Louisa Mobley Sheppard. He attended Bethany academy near Old Star Fort, and later attended Furman university in Greenville. He left Furman before graduation, but in 1925 that university conferred upon him the honorary degree of doctor of laws. After leaving Furman he studied law in the office of Butler and Youmans in Edgefield, remaining a member of the firm until it dissolved. He practiced later with LeRoy F. Loumans, and then, November 22, 1875, became associated with his brother, Orlando Sheppard. The firm of Sheppard Brothers continued to be one of the leading firms at Edgefield for more than fifty years. Today, in the same small building, which resembles a house more than an office building, Mr. Sheppard's son, the present lieutenant governor, James O. Sheppard, has his law office.

In 1882 John C. Sheppard was elected Lieutenant-governor on the ticket with Governor Hugh S. Thompson, and the entire ticket were re-nominated in 1884. Before the expiration of his term, Governor Thompson resigned, in July, 1886, to accept the position of assistant secretary of the treasury, tendered him by President Cleveland. Lieutenant-Governor Sheppard succeeded Governor Thompson, filling out the unexpired term from July to December, 1886.

"His brief administration as chief executive," says The News and Courier, "was notably successful. His message to the general assembly of

that year reviewing and analyzing the fiscal and economic conditions of the state was regarded as an uncommon and highly valuable state paper and was widely read and studied."

The affairs of the state were conducted in a conservative and businesslike manner, but he failed of re-election because he was out of sympathy with the leaders of the farmers' movement then coming into power.

In 1892 Mr. Sheppard was nominated for governor by the Conservative element opposed to B. R. Tillman. Tillman had become governor in 1890 and was offering for re-election. The campaign was bitter in extreme, especially in Edgefield, of which county Tillman and Sheppard were both natives. Sheppard was defeated, but in defeat he gained a victory which the passing years have not erased. At his death, at his home in Edgefield, October 17, 1931, leading newspapers of the state paid tribute to his stand at a time when surrender of principle might have meant political success.

The State said editorially of him: "Sheppard's campaign was a gallant, costly and not unperilous gesture, recognized by him for what it was, yet undertaken and steadfastly carried through, that principles in which he and his friends believed might not want assertion. Adhering to the Conservative cause, by temperament and taste, as well as by conviction, Sheppard, it is said, rejected overtures from the forces then becoming dominant to make him their candidate for governor and preferred the harder though to him the more honorable course of a hopeless opposition."

"John C. Sheppard belonged to the long head roll of old-fashioned public servants in South Carolina to whom public service that was less than devoted, honest, high-minded, was unthinkable. May the tradition persist!"

Said the Greenville News: "Those days are almost forgotten history for the present generation, and the bitterness and factionalism of the Tillman and anti-Tillman fight have passed away. But the memory of John C. Sheppard stands out as that of a patriot, unwilling to surrender his conscientious views for political advantage, yet willing to enter a political fight, against heavy odds, in behalf of principles and policies which he felt to be essential to the welfare of the state. And South Carolina mourns his passing as the loss of a conscientious citizen of high principles and high ideals, who gave his best to his state in a critical hour cheerfully and ungrudgingly."

The News and Courier, Charleston, in an editorial "Sheppard. His Choice," said: "Had Mr. Sheppard refused the nomination in 1892 he would very probably have been elected governor or United States senator. The Tillmanites were openly bidding for men of brains, but Sheppard chose his company. . . . It was that choice for which more than all his services The News and Courier honors him."

The Spartanburg Journal spoke thus of him: "True to his political convictions and environment, he never accepted expediency or compromise in any form or guise. He pitched his campaign on a high plane, and hopeless as it proved to be, commanded the respect of the electorate. South Carolina has not a

truer, more loyal son than was John Calhoun Sheppard of Edgefield."

After the campaign of 1892 Governor Sheppard was summoned several times again into public work, as a member of the constitutional convention of 1895 and as state senator, 1898-1902, and for an unexpired term in 1919, succeeding his son-in-law, B. E. Nicholson, who passed away while a member of that body.

Mr. Sheppard was president of the Bank of Edgefield from 1890 until his death in 1931. He was chairman of the board of trustees of the Edgefield schools from 1891 until 1925, and

served as president of the South Carolina Bar association in 1908.

He married Miss Helen Wallace of Union, May 23, 1879, and of their eight children, six are living and are splendid representatives of two of South Carolina's finest families. In 1929 Mr. and Mrs. Sheppard observed their 50th wedding anniversary very quietly at their home in Edgefield. Since her husband's death, Mrs. Sheppard spends a portion of the time with her children residing elsewhere, and is here during most of the summer months. Her queenly bearing and gracious charm have only been enhanced with the passing years. At the hospitable home in Edgefield also reside Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. James O. Sheppard. In speaking of the residence of Governor Sheppard it is an interesting fact that when his parents moved to Edgefield the family lived in the old house in the DeVore grove which had been occupied in years past by McDuffie. This house was burned a few years ago.

Governor Sheppard sleeps in old Willowbrook cemetery in Edgefield, where rest the remains of a noble company who helped in the building of South Carolina. On his monument are the words: "Long will his memory linger in the thoughts of the generation that knew him, respected him and loved him for his leadership in every worthy cause."