

MRS. KATE BURR JOHNSON

To Mrs. Kate Burr Johnson belongs the distinction of being the first woman in the United States to be appointed Commissioner of Public Welfare for a state or commonwealth. And, her appointment marked the first time in the history of North Carolina that a woman had been called upon to occupy a position of such importance and responsibility.

Mrs. Johnson was born in Morganton, North Carolina in 1887, the daughter of Frederick Burr and Lila Walton Burr. She was educated at Queens College and had special training at the New York School of Social Work and the University of North Carolina, the latter just prior to occupying her position in the Public Welfare Department. She became a resident of Raleigh when she married Clarence Alfred Johnson in 1904.

As director of the Division of Child Welfare with the State Board, Mrs. Johnson was well grounded in the activities of the public welfare program. Her experience included affiliation and enthusiastic interest in civic and social organizations. During World War I, she was a member of the state committee charged with selling Liberty Bonds, and she had served as vice-president and member of the executive committee of the N. C. Conference for Social Service. She had been elected a member of the American Academy of Political and Social Science and of the National Probation Association. She was a member of the executive committee of the Child Welfare League of America and had served as president of the

N. C. State Federation of Women's Clubs. During the administration of President Hoover, Mrs. Johnson was called in as a consultant in connection with the 1930 White House Conference on Child Welfare.

During Mrs. Johnson's term of office, from 1921 to 1930, there was constant development and growth in the public welfare program. There were important changes in the laws and the founding of new and needed institutions. Improvement of prison conditions, enactment of the sterilization law, and other reforms marked this period. The staff of the State Board was enlarged and the work was more fully organized into specialized departments.

In 1930 Mrs. Johnson resigned to accept a position as Superintendent of the State Home for Girls in Trenton, New Jersey, and with that work was instrumental in developing a statewide program for an among the women prisoners of the state of New Jersey. She served in this position until her retirement in 1948.

After her retirement, she served on the Prison Advisory Commission in North Carolina under Governor Kerr Scott. In 1954 she was the recipient of the year's Distinguished Service Award for Women presented annually by the Chi Omega Sorority. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1954 conferred on her the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters for outstanding work in her field.

Mrs. Johnson's courage, executive ability, clear thinking, and other qualities combined to mark her term of office as Commissioner of Public Welfare in North Carolina one of expansion, increased public interest, support, and recognition, not only in North Carolina but throughout the nation. She died in Raleigh in 1968 at the age of 87.