



Portrait of Professor Emeritus O. R. Johnson, presented to the College of Agriculture by alumni and friends of the University. Ned Etheridge, the artist, is shown beside the painting.

Johnson: Farmers' Economist

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Few men, even among those who round out five decades of active service, receive praise as generous as that accorded Professor O. R. Johnson by the University of Missouri, its alumni and friends, on April 5 at the Memorial Student Union. Two hundred seventy-four persons, and their free-will contributions provided amply for the O. R. Johnson Memorial Library and portrait presented to the College of Agriculture.

Testimonial letters and banquet speakers ranked the guest of honor near the top among the most widely quoted farm economists of his day—and most frequently called into consultation by bankers, industrialists and government agencies working with rural people. Very early in his career he set a new pattern for farm management research—gathering his data

directly from the farmers themselves, as he and his students walked with them through their fields and feedlots.

Before this time, reports of farm account keepers in the various states had been sent out to Washington for analysis and preservation. In Missouri, however, D. Howard Doane, head of the newly formed Farm Management department, was urging that these reports be returned to their own state colleges—to be kept there for study and use in demonstration meetings in the areas of their origin. In two years this plan was approved, and the demonstration record keepers became the local cooperators in the first half-dozen county units of the newly organized Extension Service.

During the same period, 1910 to 1912, Johnson received his A.M. degree from the University and was

promoted to instructor and placed in charge of farm management research and teaching. Before the end of 1913, Mr. Doane was transferred to the Extension Service as Missouri's first State Leader of County Agent Work. At the same time Johnson became chairman of the Farm Management department, a position he held until he asked to be relieved of administrative duties in 1957.

In seven years as a student and staff member of the College of Agriculture, he had become chairman of a department that was to grow from the smallest to the largest in the college—swept along in a flood of new ideas and developments in his chosen field. Except for this initial choice, however, he disclaims credit for this early burst of speed.

"It was Mr. Doane," he insists, "who first saw the importance of the farmers' accounts and observations. He also developed our method of obtaining and using them, starting Missouri's original eight U. S. Demonstration Farms in as many counties. And in later years, with the constant aid of the Extension Service, our growing department greatly increased the number of farm cooperators and used their experience to point out the most successful farm management systems."

In this era, also, several new workers were added to the department staff, greatly broadening the scope of its services, including the organization of the Missouri Farm Management Association and scores of county livestock shipping associations.

Moreover, when the Federal Farm Loan associations were assailed with unfair propaganda by unprincipled private loan agencies attempting to prove that private money had always been amply available on easy terms and low interest rates, the College of Agriculture was ready with the actual facts in the case. By a statewide survey, Johnson's department found that farmers of every degree of financial soundness were paying for their long-term loans 8.3 to 10 percent annually—including interest, commissions and fees.

In 1917 Johnson was granted a leave of absence to enlist in the armed services for the duration of World War I. After his Officer Training course at Ft. Sheridan that summer and fall, he went overseas as a Second Lieutenant, Field Artillery, in the Reserve Corps. After finishing the French artillery course at Saumur in March, 1918, he served at the front until the war's end. He participated in three major engagements; Chateau Thiery, Soissons, and Meuse-Argonne; he was wounded at the first, gassed at the second. Returning home with his regiment, 32nd Division, 121st Field Artillery in May, 1919 he resumed his work at the University on June 1, 1919 and was promoted to full professor soon after his return.

Both before and after the war, he regularly conducted his summer surveys, in which he combined research and graduate teaching. With a group of graduate students, he would set up a temporary base

in the area to be studied and for two months they would visit farmers, walking with them through fields and pastures, discussing their plans of management, and inspecting the results as evidenced by the condition of their crops, their livestock and their service buildings. They would interview as many as 300 to 600 farm families in a good farming county in a single summer's work. The data gathered were immensely helpful in research, the experience was education at its best for the students. Many of the families interviewed became demonstrators and local leaders in Extension work.

All of these activities afield, supplemented by the more confining labors of the department's analysts, statisticians, marketing and price specialists, applying their skill to the management problems of specific farm and home enterprises have created a great backlog of basic principles on which any farm family can draw at will.

On this sound and comprehensive foundation the University's Agricultural Extension Service and leading farm families in the 1930s began the development of the Missouri Balanced Farming system—family planned capitalization of all the resources of farm and home for maximum efficiency of enterprises for which these resources are best adapted, plus utilization of increased earnings for the benefit of the entire family.

During his years as head of the Agricultural Economics department, O. R. Johnson has contributed more than 40 bulletins to the College list of free publications. In 1925 he was granted sabbatical leave for graduate study at Cornell University, and there completed the subject matter requirements for the Ph.D. degree and passed his qualifying examination. During his active career, also, he has maintained his membership in the American Farm Economics Association continuously since 1911 and has preserved all issues of its official *Journal of Farm Economy* (five issues a year) since that date. Likewise he has been a member of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences since its establishment in 1913, and has a complete file of its *Annals* to date.

He is also a member of the Society for Promotion of the Agricultural Sciences, Sigma Xi, Gamma Sigma Delta and Alpha Zeta.

He was on special assignment to the federal Farm Credit Association in 1934 to help organize Production Credit associations in the Eighth Land Bank District. He also served as reviewing appraiser for the Land Bank Commissioner.

More recently, in 1947, he was assigned to teach farm economics to rural ministers and church lay leaders from eleven states and Canada enrolled in a summer course at Garret Biblical Institute of Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois.

As churchman and civic leader in Columbia, he has served far beyond the call of duty. He has been a member of the Presbyterian Church since his first week here as a freshman in the University. He helped

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versity of Missouri," Dr. Ellis explains. "We are one of the wealthiest states with a single state university. We can develop one of the great universities if we can convince the State of the desirability of it. We have the historically-important backgrounds, the ideal location, and if we do the right kind of an educational job we can make it one of the great universities of the United States.

"We cannot get it done in a year. We have Wisconsin and Minnesota universities as models of what can be accomplished with a single state university, and we are more able to support one such university and have just as much need as they do.

"During a period of expansion we can add judiciously to our staff, and that is good because you can't build alone by rewarding your present staff. Expansion is an opportunity in growth to add quality."

His goal is to accomplish this in the next seven years—actually in only five from an appropriations standpoint as the University now is in a fiscal biennial period in which most funds for the next two

years have been determined by legislative appropriations.

Salary requirements for the faculty and staff will always be the No. 1 problem, he explains. That has always been President Ellis' theme before the General Assembly. Funds must be available to retain capable staff members, for "judicious" additions, and the first question—regardless of buildings, library, scientific equipment, or fringe benefits—is the basic salary offer and prospects for future increases.

The Columbia business man who wrote the unsolicited letter of recommendation to the Board president had a second paragraph that seems appropriate nearly five years later:

"I have known the man for 20 to 25 years," he said in reference to President Ellis. "I have never heard an uncomplimentary remark made about him—an enviable record for any man."

It's still virtually impossible to find anyone who has uncomplimentary remarks about President Ellis. An enviable record, indeed.

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this congregation organize its first Christian Endeavor Society, served 29 years as secretary-treasurer of the Sunday School, two years as its superintendent and many years in the church choir.

Besides leading Boy Scout work in his own church, he was long a member of the district committee and the Great Rivers Area council, serving seven years as president of the area council and receiving the Silver Beaver award from the National Council.

In community work he has long served on the City Library board and on several other boards and commissions. At a critical turning point in Columbia history, he served 14 years on the City Council; the first eight years in the mayor-council form, and the remaining six years under the Charter and city manager plan.

In his family life, O. R. Johnson inherited and put into daily practice the principles that made him an outstanding student and educator.

The oldest of the eight children reared by Henry and Matilda Minor Johnson, Oliver Ray grew up on a 289-acre tenant farm in Holt County, Missouri four miles from the town of Maitland. With the older boys working nine months of the year and attending school in the midwinter months, the Johnson family operated this big farm for 17 years on the basis of partnership with the owner. Each of the children had definite responsibilities and experienced the joy of individual skill and achievement.

Walking to the Maitland high school, four miles and back daily, O. R. completed the course in two winters, graduating as salutatorian of his class in 1906. And, by the way, his brother Roy, 15 months younger than himself, was a classmate graduating as valedictorian! Both entered the University of Mis-

souri that fall, promptly qualifying as distance runners on the Varsity track team.

Similar emphasis on family accord and planned preparation for worthwhile achievement has characterized the O. R. Johnson family on Lathrop Road in Columbia. The same year that O. R. became instructor in farm management, 1911, he married Ruth Phillips, daughter of a prominent Kansas City teacher. She, too, had just graduated from the University with degrees in arts and education.

Their son, Oliver Henry, has three degrees; A.B. and A.M. in Chemistry from Missouri and Ph.D. from Cornell. During World War II, he served as a munitions expert in the African, Italian and European mainland campaigns, rising to the rank of Major. On his return to the home land, he was assigned to the Navy as a Colonel in the Ordnance Department, a task which has kept him busy since that time.

Their daughter, Dorothy Elizabeth Imlach, was elected Phi Beta Kappa in her senior year and has two degrees from Missouri, A.B. and A.M. in Botany. She, too, is serving in the U. S. Navy as Scientific Artist in the Medical Research Laboratory at San Francisco.

For 25 years the Johnson home on Lathrop Road was constantly open to informal gatherings of Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls and student groups. Matching Professor Johnson's own record in youth work, Mrs. Johnson conducted summer camps for her Campfire Girls—always with O. R.'s help in transportation, arrangements for campsites, and pitching of tents beside at least a dozen of Missouri's clear-water streams. In all, more than 250 girls shared these wisely planned and supervised experiences.