

# HISTORY MAKER

## DR. JOHN LEWIS JOHNSON

**Born:** Feb 13, 1818, Philadelphia, PA

**Died:** Nov 3, 1900, Winston, NC

**Known as:** An early physician, pharmacist, and dentist in Winston and active Union operative during the Civil War as a founding member of the Forsyth chapter of the Heroes of America.

In 1860, as the country teetered on the brink of civil war, Dr. John L. Johnson moved his family from Lexington to Union Cross and set up a medical practice in Winston, the newly formed Forsyth County seat. Two years later, he and two of his sons became members of the Confederate Co. H of the 48th North Carolina Infantry. He was captured at the Battle of Antietam when he stayed with wounded men on the field but paroled shortly thereafter, which was out of keeping with usual practices of the Union Army.

Historians theorize this unexpected leniency may be proof that Johnson was already known to be an active Union supporter. After his release, he served as a druggist at the Confederate hospital in Raleigh, where he helped organize a local chapter of the Heroes of American, a secret society dedicated to restoration of the Union.

Born in Philadelphia, Johnson was the eldest child of Dr. Henry M. and Hannah (Lewis) Johnson. The Johnstons had lived in Virginia since 1690, when the first of the line immigrated from Scotland. The senior Johnson attended school in Philadelphia, one of the few medical schools in the country at the time.



John followed in his father's footsteps studying first as an apprentice with Dr. William Lindsay in Lexington and then medical school in Philadelphia. He returned in 1855 to Lexington, where he was a druggist.

His Unionist activities, by necessity at the time, were clandestine, so the full extent of his actions may never be known. Forsyth and surrounding counties had large Quaker and Moravian populations that were vocal in their opposition to the rebellion on both political and religious grounds, and the Heroes of American and other Unionist organizations found fertile ground here. However, when Johnson's work in the Heroes of America was discovered, he was forced to flee north until after the war.

He became a county leader in the state's growing Republican party and helped draft the founding resolutions in 1867. They supported full voting rights for "freedmen," the removal of officials who were in office during the war and revocation of citizenship for "unrepentant Rebels." After the resolutions were unanimously adopted, Johnson proposed one more, which was also accepted that day: "That we adopt for the motto of our banner the words 'Union, Liberty and Equality.'"

—KATE RAUHAUSER-SMITH