

JOHNSON, Mai Rutledge Smith  
INTERVIEWEE

Interviewer: Roy Flynn  
Louse Pettus Archives and Special Collections  
Winthrop University

**Interview # 661**

Interviewed: 1965  
Transcribed: October 19, 2021  
MP3 File of Cassette Recording  
Length: 01:01:21

**Abstract:** In her interview with Roy Flynn, Mrs. Mai Rutledge Smith Johnson (1878-1978) discusses her experiences as the wife of Dr. David Bancroft Johnson, founder of Winthrop. Mrs. Johnson describes what lead Dr. Johnson to found Winthrop and the process he went through to establish the college as well as the community around Winthrop. She discusses the beginning of Winthrop and her experience as a student and later as the President's wife. Mrs. Johnson also discusses Dr. Johnson as a person both in his home life and his work life.

\*This is an edited transcription. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	<b>RF: Mrs. Johnson we certainly thank you for taking the time to be with us to record these recollections of life at Winthrop as you have observed it. I'd like to begin with the very, very beginning of Winthrop. I wonder if President Johnson ever commented to you on the factors which led him to feel that establishing such an institution was necessary. What was it that made him begin what must have been a tremendous task of establishing Winthrop College?</b>

MJ: He [clears throat] was superintendent of the city schools of Columbia. So often when a teacher was absent on account of sickness or something that had happened in the family there was no trained teacher to take their place. He would have to himself go and teach that class. It was right after the War Between the States and the education of women had been retarded on account of that because South Carolina of course was very poor. We were just emerging from reconstruction days. So he saw the great need of trained teachers. Women were trained in those days simply to be in the home and to have that...to be able to speak probably in another language, French, and know how to play on the piano. Society more or less not the come down to Earth things in the home and in the classroom. So he saw that great need of having trained teachers that could take the places of these that would have to drop out for one reason or another. So he came

that day and told his mother, 'If I could just get enough money to go north. To get the Peabody board interested in giving us enough money to start a Winthrop Training School for teachers.' So he brought it up before the city board of the city schools of Columbia. Laid the need before them. They realized the need and said 'Why yes we'd be very glad for you to go and do that but we haven't got the money to pay your way. Now if you're willing to pay your own way and go up to Boston and do that why our blessing goes with you, but that's all.' [Both laugh].

00:03:20 So he did. He went to Boston to see Dr. Winship. Dr. Winship was then connected with the...I don't know what department it was of education up there. He sent him to see a Ms. Leonard, who was quiet a noted teacher. He went and called on Ms. Leonard and found her down in the cranberry bogs. He presented to her the great need of having her to come down. And be one of his teachers. She consented. Then he had to get the money. So he went to see Mr. Robert C. Winthrop who was chairman of the Peabody board. He was very much impressed with Mr. Johnson's...idea and the great need of South Carolina for trained teachers. He said well he would be glad to present the need before the Peabody Board when it met in November. This was in...August, I think. Mr. Johnson said 'Oh but Mr. Winthrop, we have to have the money right away. I want to open my school in September.' He said, 'Well I haven't got the authority to give the money. I'd be glad to see that you get it.' He said, 'Well isn't there some way.' Mr. Winthrop was so impressed with the great need that he said that he would take the responsibility on himself and grant the money to start the training school for teachers. He said 'And I will give you \$50 of my own money.' Now, they got that wrong about Winthrop being named Winthrop because of the gift of \$50, that Mr. Winthrop gave to Winthrop College. It was out of gratitude for Mr. Winthrop's pressing the need to the Peabody Board. That was why Winthrop was named Winthrop College. Because he pressed the need before the Peabody Board. You see, they had funds to distribute all over the South for the education of...

00:06:09 **RF: Without this kind of very strong support and without Mr. Winthrop's understanding the urgency it never would have begun apparently.**

MJ: Urgency. No! Mr. Johnson was so urgent that Ms. Leonard was willing to come down and be one of our first teachers in Columbia. It started, as you know, in a little house in Columbia with these two teachers. Ms. Leonard and Ms. Annie Bonum [spelling?] of Columbia who was quiet a noted teacher in Columbia in the city and started... Then, as you know, the history of Winthrop I suppose, it was moved to the little chapel that was on the Seminary campus in Columbia. The Columbia Theological Seminary. That the Seminary was closed that year on account of a controversy that was going on over evolution.

00:07:17 **RF: No, this I did not know.**

MJ: You did not know, well. They were trying to teach evolution according to the Darwin theory. They wouldn't stand for it. Which I am thankful they wouldn't. So

rather than have it, they closed the college. They closed the Seminary. So this little chapel where many Presbyterian students preached their trial sermons, Mr. Johnson asked that he be allowed to hold his first school there in that Chapel after moving from a house.

00:08:02 **RF: How long did it stay there?**

MJ: We moved up—it stayed there—that was in, I think, '86 they were in that chapel. It might have been a little later. I think so, because starting the house he got the money in '86. He must have started in the house. Then it moved into the little chapel. Now I might have that wrong. It might be just the opposite. It might have been that the Seminary opened again and we had to move out but we could say '86. I knew it was the year of the earthquake because I said there was an upheaval in education as well as in... [Both laugh] So he got the money but you can see how Mr. Winthrop was impressed with the great need to get the money for the beginning of Winthrop.

00:09:03 **RF: Did Mr. Winthrop maintain an interest in the developing college after it began?**

MJ: Well now I can't tell that because I don't remember. I know that Mr. Johnson must have felt because one of the societies, we had two literary societies at the beginning of Winthrop, one was named for Robert C. Winthrop. The Winthrop Literary Society. The other was named for Dr. Curry. I expect you remember about Dr. Curry, he was a man of great interest in education also. So Robert C. Winthrop, I don't know when Robert C. died. I just...

00:09:48 **RF: Well that doesn't matter we weren't terribly concerned with specific dates, I was more interested of course in the spirit behind many of these things.**

MJ: He must have had a great interest. I don't think Mr. Johnson would have named a society for him and then his portrait hangs in the main hall there. You know those Winthrops, one brother came to South Carolina.

00:10:15 **RF: Oh to live permanently?**

MJ: To live. In Charleston. I'm related to that branch.

00:10:20 **RF: Oh really? This I did not know.**

MJ: Yes. The others stayed in New England.

00:10:25 **RF: Of course Winthrop has been a name that goes way back in New England history too. Well now, the beginning of this institution which was a humble beginning when you look at it by standards of things today, a couple**

**of teachers, a small amount of money, a tremendous amount of zeal, dedication to a cause, energy on the part of the people who were founding the institution but you could not have predicted from this beginning the institution which exists today.**

MJ: Have you seen the photograph that was taken before Mr. Johnson died?

00:11:20 **RF: No, I have not.**

MJ: That was his vision. Buildings just covered this campus. He had a—he was a man of vision. He saw great things. He didn't deal in little things. He was a man of vision.

00:11:40 **RF: Many people, of course, have a vision.**

MJ: But he put feet on the vision. Or into the vision.

00:11:50 **RF: He must have had tremendous energy and drive.**

MJ: He did. It broke him down the first year. Had to go off for a nervous breakdown. I mean, the beginnings because he wanted to start it right. He wanted to lay the foundation on a rock [hits chair with hand] and not on sands. It has continued and has grown. We've had our ups and downs but as you see what it is now. He lived to see so much of his ideas come true.

00:12:28 **RF: It must have been a great deal of satisfaction to him.**

MJ: Mighty few men—he used to say mighty few men lived to see their vision materialize in brick and stone as I have been allowed to. But he looked to God in everything.

00:12:48 **RF: This is undoubtedly one of the underlying secrets for—**

MJ: And he'd instill that in his girls.

00:12:59 **RF: One of the great values in our look back on the history of an institution or a nation or one of the great values in history, I suppose, is discovering principles which we can apply as we plan for the future. You have observed the either first hand or through contact with Dr. Johnson the 75 year span of Winthrop College. What of the things which made Winthrop grow and develop over the years should we keep in mind as we plan for the future, as we develop the institution that is to come?**

MJ: I think because his one ideal that Winthrop was here to serve, therefore it was service. That was his one idea. We are here to serve. We are here to serve the state of South Carolina. I think that's what she's doing. We are here to send out

teachers. We are here to send out homemakers, mothers, and to bring their children up in the right way in their homes to be Christian homes. He always you know, he was—wherever he went he was always they would start a Christian association. Young Men's. Always. Therefore he started a Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA] in this college.

00:15:06 **RF: Was this unusual in the day? In that time?**

MJ: Well he was started at the University of Tennessee where he graduated. He was the first President of that Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA]. His portrait hangs in the university hall there. He was a graduate of the University of Tennessee. Of course, I'd never heard of a YW. In Charleston we had a YMCA but he started the YW at Winthrop. He said he wouldn't start any college without having a Christian association in it.

00:15:58 **RF: Do you think that if in the days when the need for a school for women occurred to Dr. Johnson, if in those days young men had also been teaching school—if men had been used as much as women as teacher, do you think he would have had in mind a co-educational institution to train teachers?**

MJ: Well I never heard him talk about a co-educational school. In those days we never thought of that.

00:16:36 **RF: It was just not—that's right. It seemed to me that since he was oriented to the goal of service and apparently a very realistic man, apparently very perceptive. Saw the conditions that existed and developed the means to improve those existing conditions. I wonder if the need had been as great for trained men and women in this area that he was particularly interested in, the teaching of schools.**

MJ: You know, I think he was so interested in the home. That was woman's place. He was a great believer in the homemaker. They make—see that's how we started this home management house. The girls could go back and know how to run their own homes.

00:17:44 **RF: Now is this—**

MJ: And our men didn't do that so therefore he didn't see the need you see. The university was taking care of its men. The university was not co-educational when Mr. Johnson come along. South Carolina was a small state. So we were to take care of the women that they were to be the homemakers; the men were—

00:18:09 **RF: To learn the professions.**

MJ: Profession. Women didn't enter into the professions that they enter into now though they were beginning to. You must remember that, they were beginning to. Now he's a man of such vision that I don't know what he would have done.

00:18:30 **RF: I rather suspect that anyone who was as—after all wasn't it something a little bit daring to develop an institution for higher education for women in those days?**

MJ: It was daring to develop an education that had the industrial part of it.

00:18:49 **RF: Yes. So this is—**

MJ: They call it now Home Economics but when I came to Winthrop it was to come along with the literary course and it was a high literary course where languages were taught, Latin and French, but it was also for the down to Earth where you came to learn how to keep house and to sew. You had a wonderful course in music, you had wonderful courses in art but it was also along with that was the practical. That women just simply couldn't learn to be...

00:19:30 **RF: Decorative.**

MJ: Decorative but they had to come down. The day would come and they would have to be in the kitchen and in the homes where things had to be done.

00:19:47 **RF: So then in a sense this was—**

MJ: A family life.

00:19:50 **RF: In a sense providing formal education in this area marked him as something of a pioneer in his day.**

MJ: We were looked down on at first. For instance, I came to Winthrop and they said 'Oh are you going to Winthrop to learn how to sew and cook?' My friends went to fashionable schools. So it was a pioneer work. Now they've all taken it over. These fashionable schools are realizing the need.

00:20:20 **RF: I suspect they have been.**

MJ: So he was a pioneer. As his forbearers were before him.

00:20:27 **RF: It's just a— It's interesting to speculate but of course doesn't accomplish anything in particular but it is interesting to suppose. That in this day and age which is so full of opportunities for pioneering that he probably would have been very much in his element. Would have been...**

MJ: I think he was a person that kept up with the times if it did not lower standards.

00:20:59 **RF: Of course it's very important to know when to move ahead and when to hold the line too.**

MJ: It takes as much backbone to stand the tide as to go—you know we have to know when to go ahead and when to stand back. We run ahead of the Lord a lot of times and the Lords wants us stand still.

00:21:18 **RF: I suspect that's very, very true. Now, may I ask you some personal questions such as...you refer to the fact that you came to the college, I don't suppose it occurred to you when you arrived on the campus that you would one day be the wife of the President?**

MJ: Far from it. [laughs] Neither did it occur to me while I was here. [chuckles]

00:21:44 **RF: Now as I understand it, you came as a student, completed your course of study...**

MJ: I came as a special. I did not take a four year course I came strictly to go out and I was a very shielded person. My parents died when I was a child and my uncle adopted me. I had that spirit of independence. Wanted to go out and make my own living and not be a burden on him, though I couldn't have had a father that was more devoted to me, so in those days girls were stenographers and typewriters. They didn't call them business and—

00:22:32 **RF: Clerks and typists.**

MJ: So I came to Winthrop, you see, and got in by the skin of my teeth. I really think it was predestination. I don't know how I got in because they had a waiting list. I got in and I don't know how I did but the Lord's hand was in it. Well...of course people laugh when I tell them Mr. Johnson's estimate of me when he first saw me. He told his sister, who was his secretary at the time and his favorite—he liked to get to the window overlooking the campus and see the students as they were outside and I was told this afterwards by his sister. I happened to be walking by and he said 'Well Florence, there's a student that's going by right there you see her? She'll not amount to a row of pins, she might as well pack her little grip and go back home.' [RF Laughs] She said 'Well why do you say that?' 'Well you just look at her and see. She's nothing but a little society butterfly.'

00:23:52 **RF: Has it ever occurred to you that even then, at that moment, he may have been resisting giving up his bachelorhood? [laughs]**

MJ: No. No because I had just been here but [laughs] I didn't come in contact with him until I applied for the job in his office and I had to take my courage in

my hand to do that. We had the highest respect for Mr. Johnson. You know in those days teachers were not very familiar with their students. There was that—they were up on a pedestal. I went in with much fear and trembling to apply for the job in the office. His sister was going to get married. They suggested to me, why don't you apply for the job. I said oh no but I did. I took their advice and I applied for the job. He said 'Well just put your name down here and I'll see about it and let you know.' Well I waited and I waited and I waited and I didn't hear. So I wrote him and told him I'd like to know because I'd have to make some other—apply for a job somewhere else. So he wrote back and told me well to come on he'd try me out. So I came and I worked for the first month for nothing. To see if I would give satisfactions.

00:25:24 **RF: Oh. Why heaven's sake.**

MJ: So I worked that first year for nothing. At the end of nine months I went back home.

00:25:34 **RF: How long after that were you married?**

MJ: Well I wouldn't accept him any first. He was much older than I was. So I went back home to my home, and I got other jobs. I was in the Secretary of State's office and then afterwards in the Governor's office. Finally I saw that he really meant business so...I finally decided to marry him and I certainly am thankful I did because we lived a very, very happy life. I have wonderful memories.

00:26:10 **RF: Well that is certainly wonderful to look back on. Now as the First Lady of the campus, you weren't a great deal older than many of the students.**

MJ: Yes. It was very hard on me. He had so much patience with me. The faculty were older than I. The students were my age. Many of them were my friends and yet there was that—I could not be too friendly with them. But he was a man that loved to have the students in his home so that was a great asset. He loved to have the faculty in his home and we did a lot of entertaining and very close together. The faculty, Mr. Johnson and I were like one big family. So many of the students that were very close to us. And the Board of Trustees got to be such close friends because in those days there... as I've said to you before, there were no automobiles. They would come on a Friday and stay through Wednesday. The house was very small and cramped.

00:27:44 **RF: They lived with you while they were here?**

MJ: They lived with us while they were there. We would have to move into an out room very often. A shared room off the porch, and give up our rooms but we did it gladly. They were—became such wonderful friends to us.

00:28:00 **RF: Well I think under conditions like that people either become very close friends or very bitter enemies. [chuckles]**

MJ: Yes. Now there was one member of the board that I stood in terrible awe of. That was Pitchfork Ben Tillman. He was...but we always weathered the tide. [laughs]

00:28:30 **RF: Yes of course you did. [clears throat] Were there any...specific incidence that you recall during this period when you were really *learning* to be the wife of the President. That is to assume all those responsibilities. This must—just is the problem of running a home, of entertaining. You must have had some help.**

MJ: Oh, we had a cook and a nurse for the children.

00:28:59 **RF: But even a supervising—**

MJ: But that was all.

00:29:02 **RF: Even supervising this is a chore.**

MJ: We did it. I did it entirely myself. There wasn't anything...of course in the time of big receptions the faculty would come in and help decorate. Help prepare the—we didn't have...caterers and things like that in those days.

00:29:22 **RF: The faculty wives I suppose?**

MJ: The faculty wives would come and pitch in and make sandwiches, chicken salad, and things like that. We had a reception, you see, for the town people every year, the new students every year, and the senior class every year. Many dinners and all that were given in between. Entertaining the Board. So there was a lot of entertaining which I did not realize. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. It's a good thing those things are hid from us because we might be overcome with fear. The Lord gives us as we go along, step at a time.

00:30:07 **RF: But you must have had an instinctive feeling for this kind of thing and you must have enjoyed it or you could not have done it successfully.**

MJ: Well if you loved your husband you're going to do a thing. [both laugh] His—of course those things were done for the good of the college. They were must be done for I wanted him to be a success. He never had any of the responsibility of home. He never closed a window or shut a door. He spanked the children occasionally but even all of that I never brought all of that to him when he came home. He was strictly to run the college.

00:30:49 **RF: He ran the college and you ran the home.**

MJ: I used to run the home.

00:30:51 **RF: That's a good division of labor.**

MJ: Yes. And kept my hands off and did as little as possible. [recording skips]

00:30:58 **RF: Mrs. Johnson when the college began here in Rock Hill, what did the physical campus consist of?**

MJ: Well the President's home, it began there though a...family not connected with the college was living there. [clears throat] The President had no home so the Board decided to buy the home. The state bought the home. The President and his sister and mother took up their residence there. It went as far as I would say just a little beyond Tillman Hall. Then we began expanding. We always had the Farm. We thought that was essential to the running of the college. We only had one dormitory. When I came to Winthrop there was one dormitory. The power house and the infirmary of course in the main administration building. That was all.

00:32:16 **RF: The administration building housed what? The administrative staff was not so large in those days.**

MJ: Well for one dormitory, of course, so 350 girls we had a pretty good staff. The main building housed everything. The Training School which we called the Practice School in those days. We got away from that because it sounded like we were trying to practice on children. It was called the Practice School, and the kindergarten, the dining room, society halls, every classroom. That was all. Everything was taken care of in the main building. By the way, when the foundation was laid and Mr. Johnson brought Senator Tillman out to see it, I think he was Governor at the time, and showed him the layout of the college. Now he was a man of very strong language and I don't use that language. [RF laughs] But he looked at it and he said, 'H-- Johnson you are building all over the Earth! Look at it.' Well we had to build the Winthrop training school you see. Had to get out and we had to build the dining room, separate building and the other dormitories that came alone. The library and everything was in main building. The library was right over the front entrance of the administration building.

00:34:22 **RF: The classroom buildings and everything.**

MJ: Everything.

00:34:27 **RF: Everything else has spread out from the one main building.**

MJ: Post office. Everything was there.

00:34:35 **RF: Even when the college located here in Rock Hill, money must have been scarce considering the tremendous basic needs that had to be met. There must have had to be some cutting of corners somewhere. Where did Dr. Johnson believe in practicing economies when he had to?**

MJ: [laughs] That the—he watched them very closely but I can't tell you. For the necessary things he didn't have the decorations that we have at the beginning. The beautifying. Though he had an eye for the beautiful. He couldn't have those things. We had to have the bare essentials, then the years came. I remember when he went abroad and came back with these beautiful pictures and these frescos that he put up in the college because we had reached the point then where we could begin to add that touch that makes a college look...

00:35:47 **RF: But in the beginning it had to be—**

MJ: It—strictly, absolutely the essentials.

00:35:53 **RF: Food, shelter, instruction.**

MJ: Everything. We came here for \$8.50 board.

00:35:59 **RF: \$8.50 per week?**

MJ: No, a month.

00:36:03 **RF: A month. Well.**

MJ: I worked for nothing as I told you the first month, then I got \$25 a month after that and had to pay \$8.50 board out of that. Our needs were met. We didn't have any of the frills and furbelows I suppose you would call it. We were so happy.

00:36:36 **RF: I suppose we are interested in the frills and furbelows because now a days television, magazines, newspapers, make us terribly aware of how bad off we are if we don't have them.**

MJ: I know.

00:36:57 **RF: Without all of this—**

MJ: You know, we were so happy to stay at home. Mr. Johnson was a great backgammon player he and I used to play backgammon together. We used to read together. The children, we read to them and played parches and things like that. The home life was home. They didn't run around and off at night and you didn't know where they were. His mother, he was devoted to his mother, she lived for a year after we were married. No matter what he always had that game of

backgammon with his mother every night. Even if there was going to be a faculty reception, that game of backgammon went on with her. Well when she died I took her place and I used to feel so good when I could win a game [RF chuckles] and beat him. He had a great habit, you know he had just one arm, he had a great habit of when anything pleased him terribly of slapping down on his...[laughs] [hits chair] with that one hand. He was—I felt awfully good to know I could beat him at backgammon. Now he was a great chess player. Loved chess. We had a professor at the head of the English Department that—he and Professor John Thompson Brown would play chess together. They would be perfectly oblivious to anything that went on in that chess game.

00:38:30 **RF: Did he have any interests in any outdoor things?**

MJ: Oh yes. He was a great tennis player. One arm but he could play a wonderful game of tennis. The tennis courts used to be in front of McLaurin Hall and the girls used to gather on the porch, and the faculty too, to see the faculty play tennis. He was a great tennis player. He was a wonderful hunter. Oh he loved hunting. He would go off in the summer when he was superintendent city schools of Columbia and go up in the mountains, wild turkey hunting. Loved hunting and a good shot. He would take our second boy when he would go off on a trip and they'd go to these target shootings.

00:39:18 **RF: It's—it would be unusual today to find a man who had the breadth of interests and the skills in such a variety of things. The strength of character, the energy. Sometimes, as I have heard things about Dr. Johnson one of the things that has impressed me aside from any intellectual or administrative chores has been he must have just been a plain healthy man. In order to do all the things he did.**

MJ: Well...I don't know. He, as I told you, he had two nervous breakdowns.

00:40:00 **RF: Oh?**

MJ: On account of the heavy responsibilities on him. He didn't throw it on other people's shoulders. I think he made a mistake there, he should have put the responsibility—but he was so obsessed with making Winthrop what *he* wanted it to be and *his* ideals that he just forged ahead. Just was untiring. He wouldn't take vacations when he should. He had two nervous breakdowns.

00:40:31 **RF: Of course that's quite a price but he did recover.**

MJ: One was in the beginnings of Winthrop and he didn't take time to eat. I've known him, at least I was told afterwards, that he would come into the dining room and not have time to eat. He'd take a spoonful sugar and eat it. Gave him energy. Well he broke down, had to go to Philadelphia and was there for several months. Then come back and take it up again. Later of course he became stronger.

But you see those beginnings, they had to be carefully looked after not turned over to other hands.

00:41:18 **RF: Yes.**

MJ: When they were turned over to other hands, when he had to give up and go to Philadelphia to a...rest place, things got in a pretty bad shape. He had to be brought back because one of the faculty members...wasn't what he should have been.

00:41:49 **RF: That's very, very difficult. I would be...I would be very reluctant to try to take the place of someone like this, you know.**

MJ: Well you wouldn't want to undermine them.

00:42:01 **RF: No. No of course not.**

MJ: That's what I mean. So he had to come back you see and take it up again.

00:42:24 **RF: When was it when Dr. Johnson died?**

MJ: '28.

00:42:28 **RF: '28.**

MJ: Yes. '28. Died on Christmas Day.

00:42:32 **RF: Oh. This was right at the peak—**

MJ: Climax. Oh it was. [voice sad]

00:42:38 **RF: of the development.**

MJ: We had 2000 students.

00:42:41 **RF: Yes. I have learned that this was—**

MJ: [voice normal] We had to put curtains down the basements of the buildings. Of course it was not what it ought to have been. He didn't approve of that. But when parents just begged... Why one father said just take my daughter and I'll send her *bed* up with her [RF laughs] as if it was a case of a bed. Students were boarding in town. Three in a room. But he couldn't deny it. He saw the terrible need and they were so in earnest to come. We've got wonderful alumnae, you know.

00:43:24 **RF: I have talked with many. I could not understand why...when I was with a group of people and they were women, oh...all of a certain age. Apparently these are the people who were the graduates during this big enrollment during the '28—around the '28, late '20s. How about the days of World War One? How did this affect the college or was there a noticeable—**

MJ: I don't remember it affecting the college at all.

00:44:10 **RF: There was not any particular—**

MJ: No. Now of course, as I say I was not—now that was in 1914-17 around there.

00:44:20 **RF: Through '18.**

MJ: I can't remember that there was any...that was when the President's home was remodeled and rebuilt just before that. Because I know we did it just at the right time. I don't remember that there was any lessening of...enrollment.

00:44:48 **RF: I wondered if perhaps there were problems created by a certain shortage of food items? There was a certain amount of rationing during World War One, I understand.**

MJ: I don't think we had rationing in World War One.

00:45:03 **RF: Really? I don't know. I had thought—**

MJ: I don't remember. Now, I remember World War Two that we had to have ration cards, but in World War One I don't remember that there was that rationing.

**RF: Yes. That was a real problem. Of course World War One by standards of World War Two didn't last very long. In the sense that I think it as what 2—the United States was in it I think 2 years? I think I'm getting a little out of my field at the moment. You mentioned the wonderful alumnae. I have certainly been impressed by this also. I have said what is it? I have seen colleges that had more elaborate physical plans. I have seen colleges that had many things which on the surface you would say would be reasons for this alumnae devotion but I have never encountered an institution where women say with a tremendous amount of pride, 'I am a Winthrop graduate.'**

MJ: You know, Mr. Johnson used to say—he would hold that up to them all the time, 'As you remember you are taking Winthrop to the people. Everybody can't come to Winthrop but in your [clears throat] contacts how you act on trains, how you conduct yourself, you are Winthrop College.' That was—every time just

before they would go home for Christmas holidays ‘Remember you are taking Winthrop now wherever you go.’ I think he held that up to them so.

00:47:09 **RF: Many of them I think still feel that they are living by or have found that it is possible to live by the standards set in the days as students at Winthrop. This is a thing to feel grateful for. When you can feel that your four years were a good investment then this is certainly a reason to think kindly of the institution. Is there anything in particular, any individual or any that you would like to comment on? Whether an alumnae or a member of the faculty or trustee or any person who stands out in your mind as a person who was of particular assistance to Dr. Johnson? Or who was a particularly good friend of the college that you would like to comment on?**

MJ: There were so many that I'd hate to...

00:48:22 **RF: I suppose that's true.**

MJ: But...I think of Leela Russell. She's still living you know. Had started as a teacher at the Training School and then took over the rural schools of the state. Then became the alumnae secretary. How she loved Mr. Johnson and loved Winthrop. There were so many of that class. Ms. Dacus, who is still living, who was our first librarian. Who started our wonderful—she certainly got it started on a good foundation. Mr. Johnson persuaded her to go to Drexel [University] to be trained as a librarian. There weren't many trained librarians in those days. But he had that foresight of seeing that we need trained librarians and she went. Started our library, as I told you, it started over the main building front there. When we got the money from Mr. Carnegie with no strings attached, so she was our first librarian. Mrs. Parks and Ms. Grant and oh so many. That were just wonderful. They were alumnae of the college. Started down there in Columbia with him, except Ms. Dacus of course, she did not come to Winthrop until we had started here. But those others did. Ms. Parks, Ms. Russell, Ms. Grant, all of those were down there in Columbia with him at the Training School. Those first classes. But it's hard to pick out any one, because his Board stood behind him. Every one of them. I don't think there was a member that didn't stand. They just depended so on his judgement and saw that it was always so farsighted that they never questioned his requests. He had his Board back of him.

00:50:53 **RF: Well of course without this it would be difficult and I think this is probably one of the geniuses of Mr. Johnson that he appears to have been able to make people—**

MJ: He was firm and yet people respected that firmness. He was never unreasonable.

00:51:18 **RF: Well Mrs. Johnson, I certainly am grateful to you for taking the time to recollect some of the events in the history of Winthrop as you have lived it.**

MJ: I've had some funny experiences. I want to tell you one experience.

00:51:41 **RF: I'd love to have you do that.**

MJ: We entertained Jane Adams. Well in those days that was quiet something to—she was to give a lecture here at the college. [clears throat] We had her in our home. We were to have a buffet supper after the lecture and all of the faculty were invited over to meet her. I was just to send a tray up to her room, let her rest until the time to go over to the college for her lecture. So I said 'Ms. Adams, we'll just take you to your room and you can rest. We'll send a tray up to your room so you won't have to come down until you're ready to go to the college.' 'Oh no.' She said, 'I'll come down and have supper with you.' Well we had no supper. [RF laughs] Because everything was being saved for the buffet supper. That was a day when you didn't have supermarkets or anything that you could run to and get things. I said 'Oh no ma'am, Ms. Adams, don't think of that. You just let me...' 'Oh no.' She said, 'I'll come down. I want to just be one of the family.' [RF laughs] So whenever your hostess insists that you stay in your room and let her send a tray, you let her do it because you can imagine...[both laugh]

00:53:25 **RF: Did you finally tell her?**

MJ: Why we had to! We had to.

00:53:30 **RF: I suppose she was very understanding.**

MJ: Oh well, she was lovely but I didn't feel very lovely [both laugh] at the time. Oh my, that was some experience. My son, I often think of this, this was so really amusing. It made everybody feel so at ease. We were having a faculty dinner, some of the members of the faculty. The heads of the faculty. He was at the table sitting next to the same Ms. Grant I was telling you about. A lovely little scotch woman that taught at the training school, a graduate of Winthrop. Everybody was talking about the books they had read. Have you read this book and that book and really getting into literary discussions. Ms. Grant wasn't saying anything, neither was Bancroft saying anything. He was just about 5-years old. He turned to Ms. Grant and he said, 'Ms. Grant have you ever read The Night Before Christmas?' [both laugh] Ms. Grant said Bancroft really knew her caliber, of course it was anything but! But it was so amusing everybody just whooped because everybody was talking about these books you know that they had read. Little things like that were so amusing. The children come in and save a situation.

00:55:02 **RF: Yes and often times make adults realize that maybe they've gone a little too far.**

MJ: Ms. Withers is another. Ms. Withers is a wonderful—she was another wonderful member of the faculty. She collaborated with Dr. Kinard in a grammar

book that we have over at the library. She taught at the training school. She went with the Johnson Publishing company afterwards in Richmond Virginia. She was staying with us and Ms. Withers liked to tease my second son that we didn't have any money. Said 'your mother doesn't have anything much and you father, you people...' Just teasing a child, you know. In those days we had the chicken yard right out in our back yard. He said, 'Ms. Withers, look out there. You see that chicken yard with all of those turkeys and all in it?' She said yes. He said 'well that's why my mother hasn't got any money, she's got to feed the faculty all the time.' [both laugh] So little things like that was certainly—we had when the Governor came up, Governor Manning, to a board meeting this same boy of mine, second son, had had a very bad accident. Head was cut and he had to be in bed, stiches taken, oh he was so distressed that he couldn't see a governor. He wanted to see a governor. I said well maybe Governor Manning will come in the room, we'll let you get up put on your pajamas and come and speak to Governor Manning.' So I told the Governor and he said 'why yes I want to see him, let me speak to him.' When the dinner was over I said come on out and speak to Governor Manning. So he came out and spoke to him and Governor Manning [was] lovely to him. When he was gone and I went back in the nursery to speak to Burgh, he said 'Well mother he's just a man like anybody else.' I think he must—he had been reading colonial history. He thought of him with a powdered wig, I think, and knee britches. I don't know what. But he's just a man like anybody else. That's—so no matter how high up you are we are just a man and a woman. If we really are any count.

00:57:30 **RF: That's true, but sometimes it's a letdown for children who expect something a little bigger than life size.**

MJ: But it was such a letdown. 'He's just a man.' I have very lovely memories of Winthrop and I feel so thankful that I've been allowed to be connected with it through all the years. I'm sorry I don't see the faculty like I once did. We were very intimate with the faculty in those days. Very close to them. Even though the faculty had grown very, very large. We would have them over in groups at the home, you know, the women.

00:58:18 **RF: Were there more—was there a larger percentage of women on the faculty in those days than there is now?**

MJ: I suspect so. I suspect so. I don't—I really. It's hard to think in proportion.

00:58:39 **RF: Yes. I can appreciate that because at the time you're not looking at them as—**

MJ: And I'm sorry, so sorry that when we have the living with us we don't think to ask questions. You just think that they're going to live on, you know. Therefore so many things that I should be able to answer I'm not because as I said Mr. Johnson did not bring his business home with him. He tried to leave it. He had to.

00:59:12 **RF: Well I think this in itself indicates a great deal about the man. Because it takes a very strong man to be able to close the compartment.**

MJ: I don't know that he was any different from any other college president but I know that when we went off together he was an entirely different person. He was just like a young boy. He loved the butcher that would pass through the train, he was always buying something to eat. Something like that. He just forgot everything and just entered into a trip. He was a delightful traveling companion.

01:00:00 **RF: Well this is why I suppose it was possible to hold to a very rigid set of standards. To be able occasionally to get away and be somebody else. To—**

MJ: You know, he something to me once that I'll never forget. That I did not realize, he said 'You don't know what it is to have a member of your faculty come in with a problem. You get adjusted to that, you listen to him or her. You try to judge according to the 'for the good of the college' and to be just to the professor and put personalities entirely out of your mind. Then to have—to judge that problem. Then to have another one come in with an entirely different problem and another personality and 'the good of the college' and adjust yourself to that. And to be fair for both.' So things like that were eye openers to me about the burden he had to carry.

01:01:21 [Recording ends] **End of interview.**