

+ WEATHER +

Sunny and continued hot today and Tuesday. Fair and warm tonight, high today around 90 in mountains and 100 elsewhere.

The Daily Record



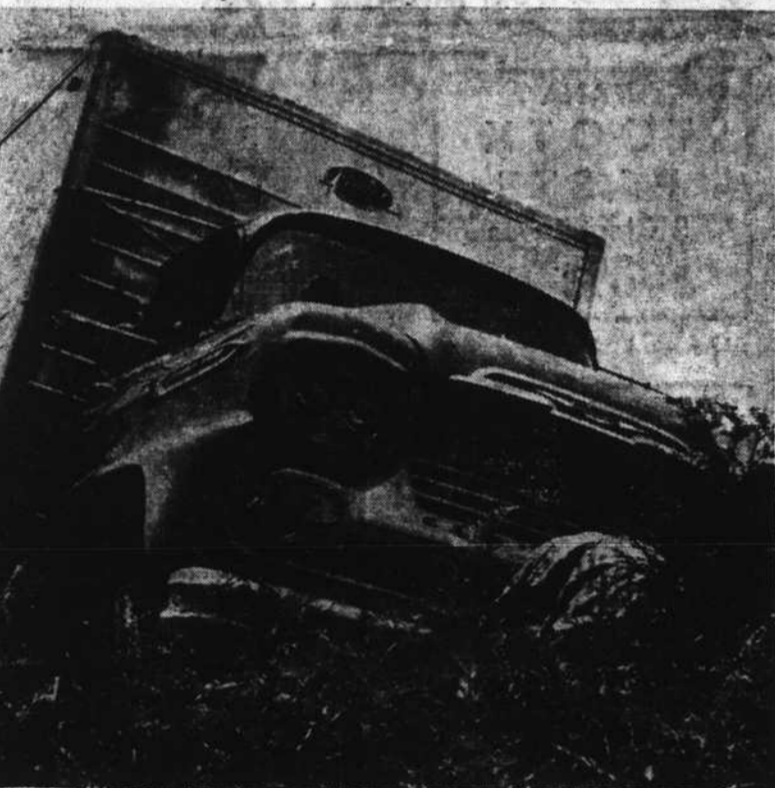
VOLUME 9 TELEPHONE 3117 — 3118 DUNN, N. C. MONDAY AFTERNOON, JUNE 29, 1959 FIVE CENTS PER COPY NO. 143

Nathan Johnson Is Dead — Lawyer Companion Also Killed In Smashup With Big Truck



IT NEVER OVERTURNED — Slammed completely out of shape, its windshield hanging cockeyed, car which carried Nathan Johnson, Sr., and C. G. Dunn to their death never overturned but its

passengers were thrown out, killed on impact. It was actually headed in opposite direction, up the hill toward Lillington, at the time of the disaster. (Record Photos by Ted Crail.)



JUST HANGING — Big trailer truck which collided with the Johnson car barely missed plunging over steep embankment. The driver was knocked unconscious, thrown into deep shock.



GRIM CHORE — Ambulance attendants lifted "Uncle Nathan's" sheet-covered body into ambulance. Both he and Dunn were killed almost instantly.



SCENE OF ACCIDENT — This sweeping stretch of road, a short distance beyond the big highway junction of U.S. 421 and 55 above Erwin, was the site of the double fatality. Truck (at right)

hovers on edge of embankment while further down a crowd has gathered around Johnson car which partly straddled the center line.

Both Men Killed Almost Instantly

By TED CRAIL
RECORD NEWS EDITOR

A smashing double fatality on a rising roadway near Erwin today claimed the lives of attorney C. G. Dunn and of Nathan Johnson, Sr., one-time farm boy who had risen like a hero out of Horatio Alger to become one of North Carolina's top merchandisers.

To thousands in this area, he was known as "Big Nathan" and as much as any man his success story had caught the imagination of those who knew him and lived beside him.

Both men were dead before the nearest man could even reach them. Thrown from the car which Johnson himself was driving as they collided with a truck, they died on impact. Dunn was thrown under the truck and Johnson landed beside one of its great wheels. Dr. Charles Byrd pronounced them dead from multiple fractures of the skull and internal injuries.

Hundreds arrived at the scene almost as soon as it happened and at the Johnson home in Dunn cars began to collect. Throughout the county, news of the death had coursed as quickly as a rifle shot. Johnson's companion was at first identified as Bart Johnson but Bart was one of those who came to the scene of the collision. With him was Bob Bass, manager of the tractor division at the Dunn store which was only a part of Johnson's merchandising empire.

"It's like losing your second daddy," Bass said. He turned away from the scene when he was still a hundred yards away and wouldn't look. Tears were in the eyes of many of those who had come to see a wreck and found the "Big Nathan" was dead.

To investigating patrolmen W. T. Harris and W. O. Grady, the reason behind the wreck was still locked in the measurements of skid marks and other physical evidence which they had taken at the scene.

The Johnson car had hit the truck while in the wrong lane but there was no clear view of why it was there.

Taken to Good Hope Hospital in deep shock, truck driver Ray B. Isaac, a 28-year-old resident of Morehead City, said to Harnett Coroner R. L. Pate, Sr., that just before the crash it had looked like Johnson was about to park.

"Isaac had been to Lillington to make a delivery to the garment factory," said Pate. "He drives for the Morehead City Garment Company."

"He said that he saw this other car run off the highway on the shoulder and he expected it to park. But then it ran back, across the center-line and into his truck. "He said he was going about 45 and it looked like the car was doing about the same."

The coroner has impaneled an inquest jury, composed of six men from Dunn, but will not schedule the hearing into the accident until the first of next week. Isaac, he said, will be transferred to the Morehead City Hospital. County Commissioner W. O. Warren was directly behind the Johnson car, but at a considerable distance, and did not actually see the accident.

"When I looked up," said Warren, "this thing had happened. I saw that a truck and car had collided on the hill."

"I pulled up and jumped out of my car and ran to it. I saw Mr. Johnson first—I thought it was him even then—lying at the back wheel. He was already dead and I could tell that the other man under the truck was dead, too."

"O. T. Wilson was there and we saw that the man in the cab of the truck needed help. He was still living. We couldn't open the door on the driver's side and the truck was so far over the embankment on the other side we couldn't get at him from there."

"He was unconscious at first and when he began to raise up he was still so confused we couldn't tell

him what to do. Wilson and I got hold of him and pulled him out through the window of the cab.

"When we pulled him out, he went completely crazy when he saw the two men lying there. He was out of his head with shock."

"I twisted him around with his back to them and slapped him in the face to bring him back to his senses."

Coroner Pate said there appeared to be no one except the truck driver who actually saw the collision as it occurred. The jury he has appointed to serve at the inquest includes Charles Hildreth, Charles Smith, J. Henry Thomas, Edwin Boyette, Gerald S. Mann and George F. Owen.

Tragic News Hit Staff Like A Bolt

The death of Nathan M. Johnson, Sr. early this afternoon practically paralyzed operation of Dunn's largest (and one of the State's largest) business firms.

News of the fatal accident in which he was involved hit officials and employees at the home office here like a bolt of lightning.

They couldn't believe it. "Big Nathan dead—No, it can't be," said officials, secretaries, clerks and others with tones of both shock and disbelief.

They referred to him as "Big Nathan" since the son who succeeded him as president of the huge company is named Nathan, Jr. Everybody identified them as "Big Nathan" or "Little Nathan."

That name Nathan—with an added—has become a household byword in Eastern North Carolina.

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NATHAN JOHNSON SR.

Came Up Hard, Lived Conservatively

"Big Nathan" Was A Self-Made Man

Nathan M. Johnson, Sr., killed early this afternoon in a tragic highway accident at the age of 68, came from a farm in Johnston County to build a business empire that stretched across two states and beyond.

He was the founder and executive vice president of Johnson Cotton Company and it affiliated stores—19 of them all in North and South Carolina—and its other far-flung manufacturing, financial, jobbing and retail operations.

These subsidiaries included two large fertilizer plants, one in Dunn and the other at Wilmington, numerous cotton gins, Southern Jobbers, a large mercantile jobbing concern, and he was also the majority stockholder in Four County Agricultural Credit Corporation.

But despite the personal fortune which he accumulated and the enormity of the business operations he directed, he remained one of the town's most unpretentious citizens. He lived conservatively, and shunned publicity and social activity with equal vigor.

It was an unusual event that kept him out of bed after 7 o'clock at night and he was usually at his office about 5 in the morning.

Though he remained in the background, he was the community's No. 1 benefactor and philanthropist. His pride and joy was the three-story Dunn hospital built at a cost of over a half million dollars by Mr. Johnson and donated to the community.

He also maintained a hospital fund for the care of the needy. He took pride in the fact that no needy person has ever been turned away.

The 100-bed hospital was opened here in 1940 but it wasn't until two years ago that Mr. Johnson was revealed to the public as the donor—and then only over his protests. At the same time, the hospital board renamed the institution Betsy Johnson Memorial Hospital in memory of his deceased mother.

He was youngest of ten children born to the late Aisey Daniel Johnson and Elizabeth Tart Johnson on May 18, 1891 on the farm.

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Erwin Bargain Days Begin Tuesday Morning

Erwin's third annual July Bargain Days celebration, designed to be even bigger than the ones previously held, will swing open Tuesday morning at 9 o'clock sharp and continue through Saturday night.

Ty Thomas, owner of Erwin Furniture Company, and George Joseph, owner of Joseph's Department Store, are in charge of the arrangements and said today that everything is in readiness.

Practically all of the business firms of Erwin are participating and are going all-out to offer bigger and better values than ever before.

Purpose of these trade events, held each January and each July, are to attract new shoppers to Erwin and to acquaint them with the outstanding stores, personnel

and stocks of merchandise waiting to serve them in the friendly town.

REAL VALUES
Each participating store is offering values you can expect to receive only once a year and sometimes not that often. Merchants

agreed today that prices will be the lowest in years.

Instead of holding individual sales at the various stores at different times, all the stores are combining to make shopping and saving in Erwin even more attractive.

All the goods being offered on sale is absolutely top-quality new merchandise, much of which was purchased especially for this event.

"And frankly," pointed out merchants today, "it's doubtful that we can replace the goods for any where near the low price we're selling it at this week."

Huge crowds are expected every day. If unable to attend the first part of the week, shoppers won't have to worry, however, because there's plenty of merchandise and new stocks will be available each day.

