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Death of Widow Recalls Vivid Career of Mississippi Leader

John Marshall Stone, Soldier and Statesman,
Ruled State In Turbulent Days After Civil
War - Was Native Son of Tennessee

By Mrs. Lyla M'Donald.
Special to The Commercial Appeal.

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IUKA, Miss., Feb. 28. --The recent death here of Mrs. John Marshall Stone, widow of the great Confederate leader, and governor of Mississippi, recalls the vivid career of one of Mississippi's greatest statesmen. Mrs. Stone had lived in Iuka three-quarters of a century. She came to Eastbrook, which later was moved to the town of Iuka in 1844.

Governor Stone ruled Mississippi during turbulent days of the reconstruction after the Civil War.

At the time of Governor Stone's death on March 26, 1900, the poetess Josie Frazee Cappleman wrote a beautiful tribute to him, closing the poem thus:

"Long will live his benefactions, long his people's life be shown: And each heart of Mississippi long will reverence John M. Stone."

If to live in the hearts of those we leave behind is not to die, then John M. Stone still lives, and "though dead, he yet speaks."

John Marshall Stone was born in Gibson County, Tenn., April 30, 1830 [*sic*], the son of Asher and Judith Royal Stone, both natives of Virginia, and both descendants of pioneer stock and Revolutionary soldiers. The father of John Stone died when the boy was about 11 years old, and upon him a large measure fell the responsibility of looking after a family of nine children.

In early manhood he taught school in his native county, forsaking that after a few years to become a clerk on a steamboat running from Eastport, Miss., to the Ohio River. Later he was a clerk in the mercantile establishment of Col. R.W. Price, the largest landowner and merchant of that prosperous village on the Tennessee River. Eastport at that time was the home of wealth and culture, the head of all year navigation on the Tennessee River, and freight from all points for east Mississippi and west Alabama came to this port, where it was loaded on wagons and carried to its destination.

Memphis, Charleston Road.

When the Memphis & Charleston Railroad was first projected, an opportunity was given Eastport to be on the railroad for a nominal sum, but the suggestion was refused, and when the railroad was completed and the new town "Iuka" established, the entire town of Eastport was moved to Iuka.

In the general exodus came John Stone, and he was chosen as the first depot agent. In this connection it is interesting to note that in the 74 years of the town's existence, there have been only three agents -- John M. Stone, Edwin Merrill and the present agent, Berry Martin.

War coming so soon on the heels of the opening of the railroad, and the conditions being so bad, the office was closed most of the time, and trains were run by the different armies.

When war was declared Tishomingo County was one of the first to respond to the call for troops, and the Iuka Rifles, Co. K, Second Mississippi, under Capt. John M. Stone, left Iuka May, 1861, for northern Virginia, and received its baptism of fire at Harper's Ferry.

At Yorktown April, 1862, Capt. Stone was elected colonel of the regiment. After receiving his commission, his regiment was in the battle of Manassas, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Seven Pines and others. In Pickett's famous charge, history has this to say:

"The only troops which seemed to be advancing were the Mississippi and Texas troops." Colonel Whiting wrote this on him: "The Second Mississippi, under Col. John M. Stone, was skillfully handled by its commander."

At the Battle of the Wilderness, Colonel Stone was publicly commended by General Lee and was given the commission of brigadier general. He was offered the command of the Texas regiment but refused to leave the men he had brought from Mississippi.

Colonel Stone was in command of Davis brigade. Davis was a nephew of Pres. Jefferson Davis. Returning from a recruiting trip to Mississippi with 800 recruits, he was surprised at Salisbury, N.C., and he said all the 800 were taken prisoners. They were taken to Johnson's Island where he was kept a prisoner until July 25, 1865.

It was at that time that his sword was taken from him and for 38 years no trace of it could be found. He advertised in many papers and had given it up for lost. Years after his death, Morris LeShure of Ohio wrote to the secretary of state of Mississippi asking if any member of the family still lived that he might return what would to them be a priceless treasure. The letter was sent to Mrs. Stone here and the sword returned. Later Mrs. Stone generously presented the sword and some valuable documents to the department of archives and history of Mississippi.

Released From Prison.

Returning to Iuka after his release from prison, he again took up the duties of the railroad agent. He was also mayor and county treasurer. In 1869, he was elected to the state senate, representing the counties of Tishomingo and Itawamba. He was made speaker pro tem of the senate and when the negro lieutenant governor, A.K. Davis, was removed from office and the carpet bag governor, Adelbert Ames, resigned under fire in 1876, Colonel Stone succeeded to the governorship and a new era dawned in the carpet bag ridden state of Mississippi. How well he served is one of the bright pages of Mississippi history. He was elected without opposition for a full term afterwards.

In 1877, Governor Stone was renominated by the state Democratic convention and was elected without opposition for a term of four years.

Governor Stone's inaugural address was significant of his principles and the rugged honesty of his life. An extract from that address shows some of the problems confronting the governor at that perilous time:

"No problem in politics was ever allotted to any people more difficult than that which the state of Mississippi in common with her sister states of the south is called upon to solve. Can any government based upon unlimited suffrage be successfully carried on between two races, the most antagonistic on earth which while according equal rights to each, shall tend to the common prosperity and happiness to both? - - Upon one point all good men will agree:

"There must be absolute and perfect protection to life, liberty and property. The government that fails to give this is unworthy of the name. The humblest citizen of the state, no matter how poor or how ignorant, must feel that over his hut the law throws its mantle and that he who dares to wrong him will feel the vengeance of the

law's ministers. There must be no tolerance upon those who are too weak to defend themselves. It was for the defense of the weak that governments were organized and laws enacted."

The above speech was typical of the life of the man. Standing like his name, a stone, against the political onslaughts of his enemies, standing against the mob which in South Mississippi threatened the life of one of the humblest of subjects and by the very force of his presence dispelling the mob staying with his state during the dark days of peril when yellow fever almost as disastrous as war engulfed the state.

After the yellow fever a state board of health was organized, the credit of which is given to Governor Stone.

Established A. & M.

The A. & M. College at Starkville was established in 1878 and put in operation under the supervision of Gen. Stephen D. Lee during the regime of Stone.

Governor Stone was succeeded by Robert Lowry. Both were citizens of Tishomingo County. As Confederate officers they stood by the side of their state during its hardest years. Both moved to Tishomingo County from West Tennessee.

After Governor Stone retired from office he returned to Iuka, where he had large farming interests and where he devoted the next few years to stock raising.

But private life was not for him to enjoy. In 1886 he was appointed by Governor Lowry as one of the first board of railroad commissioners. In 1889 he was elected by the state Democratic convention as candidate for the office of governor and elected over John R. Cameron and inaugurated January 13, 1890. It was during this term of office that the constitutional convention was called and which gave to Mississippi what was said to be one of the

best state constitutions of the United States and which has served as a model for many other states. By the terms of the new constitution, the term of Governor Stone was extended two years and the governor was ineligible for re-election. In 1896 he once more retired to private life. He was elected president of Merchants Bank of Jackson. When General Lee resigned the presidency of A. and M. College to take charge of the Vicksburg National Park, Governor Stone was called to fill the vacancy. He only served there nine months dying at the home of his adopted daughter, Mrs. Annie Stone McKie, in Holly Springs, March 26, 1900.

He was buried in Iuka, and his funeral was the largest which the town has ever witnessed. The entire student body of A. and M. College attended. Over his grave the cadets sounded taps to one of the most distinguished citizens Mississippi has given to the world.

No story would be complete which did not emphasize this home life. Governor Stone's love and devotion to those about him was beautiful. When he died his wife became a recluse. His picture was ever before her and her home was in later years the gathering place of sons and grandsons of those who fought with Stone in Virginia.

Mrs. Stone was buried by the side of her distinguished husband.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy of Iuka is known as the John Marshall Stone Chapter, and the state highway which extends from the Tennessee line on the north to the Itawamba County line on the south bears his name. It is fitting that the highway which extends from his native state, passing through the county where he lived and his buried and extending to Tishomingo County, which he represented as senator when he first entered politics way back in 1869, should honor his name.