

John Thomas Lassiter 1901-1980

Member, South Norfolk Baptist Church
Member, Deacon, Trinity Baptist Church
Taught Frank Hughes, Jr. in Sunday School at Knotts Island Baptist Church
Moderator Norfolk Baptist Association
Member, Deacon, Sunday School Teacher St. Johns Baptist Church
Bible Teacher, Virginia Baptist Home, Newport News, Va.
Member Deer Park Baptist Church
Atlantic Masonic Lodge No. 2
Norfolk Scottish Rites Bodies
General foreman and supervisor in the Department of Transportation of Norfolk
Naval Ship Yard

John, the son of William Preston and Nannie Lassiter was born March 6 1901, in a small farm house on Evanstown Rd. in rural Hertford County, NC. The family moved to South Norfolk in either late 1909 or January 1910 and soon became active members of South Norfolk Baptist Church. Family tradition holds that Nannie and the family tearfully witnessed the burning of the church in 1914.

At the age of 16 Johnnie stopped school and went to work at the Norfolk & Southern RR with his brother Claude to help support the family. He met Ina White of Knotts Island who was residing in South Norfolk with her sister Roxie Fentress. Ina was the daughter of Edmund and Julia Etta Williams White of Knotts Island.

Johnnie and Ina were married in 1922 and lived upstairs in the house of his sister Lucy and her husband Archie Pierce on Franklin Ave. in Oakdale in South Norfolk.

In 1922 the Norfolk & Southern went on strike. Johnnie got a job at the Whalen Machine Co. in Norfolk and later purchased a home nearby on Ballentine Blvd. They joined Trinity Baptist Church where he became a Sunday school teacher.

In 1928 they adopted an infant son whom they named Earl. In 1932 in the midst of The Great Depression the Whalen Machine Co. went out of business and Johnnie found himself out of work. It was not unusual for the unemployed to return to the family farm during these difficult times. In Johnnie's case, Ina's father, Mr. Edmund White offered him a job as a farm helper on Knotts Island. He gladly accepted and so they moved in with Ina's family on Knotts Island. They were fortunate to find a couple who rented their house and thereby were able to save the family home from forfeiture. Times were tough. As usual, farmers settled up their farm accounts at the end of the year. It was then that Johnnie learned that he had earned only \$33.00.

Though the sojourn was temporary, Johnnie taught a boys Sunday school class at the Knotts Island Baptist Church. Little did he realize then the influence he had on a young lad who would later become the faithful pastor and long time loyal and close friend of the Lassiter family, Rev. Frank Hughes, Jr.

The family returned to South Norfolk in 1934. Johnnie put an application in for employment at the Navy Yard. In the meantime, Cousin Henry Cale, who held a position of importance at the Royster Fertilizer plant, obtained employment for him at the fertilizer plant. It had not been long since his sister Lucy had died and Gertie and Herman had moved into Archie's home to help with the children. Johnnie and Ina moved into Gertie's home on 21st St. Soon thereafter, a 60 day temporary job became available at the Navy Yard and Johnnie was called. That was followed by another 60 day job until finally permanent employment was obtained. Soon thereafter they were able to move back to the family home on Ballentine Blvd. where they resided for the next 30 years. Family members well remember the visits from South Norfolk to Ballentine Blvd. for special events such as quilting parties and especially during Christmas time when Ina served a meal for the entire Lassiter family including all the grandchildren.

The family re-newed activity in Trinity Baptist Church and soon Johnnie began teaching Sunday school and was later elected Deacon. Both Johnnie and Ina represented their church in the Norfolk Baptist Association and assumed active roles. Johnnie was twice elected Moderator (President) of the Association and served two separate terms.

They were both active in community affairs. Johnnie was a member of Atlantic Masonic Lodge No.2 and also a member of the Norfolk Scottish Rite Bodies. Ina was a member of the Eastern Star. They were both avid bowlers and for years bowled in an organized league. They won many trophies which were proudly displayed in a full size trophy case in the living room of their home.

WWII produced tension, strain and stress in most family units and this family was no exception. Heightened security measures in the Navy Yard meant change in schedules and overtime in addition to living with fear of sabotage and threat from the appearance of German U-Boats off the coast of Virginia Beach. The greatest concern would come just after the war ended, however, when Earl joined the Navy and qualified as a submariner. He remained stationed aboard a submarine until his retirement from the Navy in --- By the time of his retirement in 1964 Johnnie had risen to the level of Supervisor and General Foreman in the Transportation Department of Norfolk Naval Shipyard. He acquired the admiration and respect of his fellow supervisors and workers for his mild manner, his character, integrity and his personal concern for their well-being. He was awarded Honorary Membership in the Quartermen and Leading Men's Association "For long and faithful service to this Association as a member and in recognition of the interest he has shown in the welfare of his fellow supervisors."