

**MAMIE LAVONIA  
SCOTT  
HAMMONDS  
1887-1962**



**SHE-SVENGALI  
OF  
GOVERNOR  
JOHNSTON**

When Henry Johnston was elected governor in 1926, he hired a long-time Democratic worker named Mamie Hammonds as his confidential secretary. Questions soon arose as to what influence Hammonds held over the governor. Her confrontational nature, intolerant disposition toward opponents, and belief that her views and ideas superseded others almost immediately made some members of the 11<sup>th</sup> Oklahoma State Legislature her enemies.

Mamie Lavonia Scott was born in June 1887 in Sevier, Arkansas. She married Oliver Hammonds in December 1906 and moved to Oklahoma City in 1924. They volunteered their time in Democratic politics because her eccentric uncle, appeals court Judge James Armstrong, had clients with connections in state government. She met Henry Johnston at the 1924 state Democratic Party convention.

Henry Simpson Johnston was a Perry lawyer before being elected to the 1896 Territorial Council and 1906 Constitutional Convention as presiding officer. He ran for U. S. Congress in 1908 and 1912 before being elected governor in 1926. Johnston and secretary Hammonds trusted their friends completely and ignored their character flaws. They also had no patience for their enemies. Both believed whole-heartedly in their own righteousness and viewed opponents out to ruin them. As a result, they lacked political finesse.

Hammonds was direct and confrontational; Johnston was indecisive. He allowed Hammonds to handle explosive situations, which she made worse. Hammonds insulated Johnston from his political opponents and any matters she deemed not worthy of his consideration.

During his first week in the job, Johnston innocently decided to pave Oklahoma's highways with asphalt instead of concrete, until his critics discovered Judge Armstrong had a vested financial interest in the material being used. Newspapers and magazines reported that Hammonds hypnotized Johnston and took over leadership of the state.

In November 1927, accusations of alleged mismanagement in the Highway Commission and limited access to Johnston led legislative leaders to label Hammonds as the Shadow Governor, and the "She-svengali" of Oklahoma. On Christmas Day 1928, the legislators arrived at the Capitol to impeach Johnston, but seventy National Guardsmen blocked the door.

More Johnston's opponents were elected in 1928 so they quickly began to impeach Johnston again. Under pressure, Hammonds resigned on February 6<sup>th</sup>, but it was far too late to undo the damage. In her resignation to Johnston, she proclaimed, "I discharged my duties...with honest motives."

Johnston's trial lasted through March 1929. Senators brought up Hammonds' influence but Hammonds never testified. Johnston was only convicted of one charge – general incompetence – and removed from office on March 20<sup>th</sup>. He returned to Perry "with a clear conscience" to practice law, returning to the State Senate from 1933 to 1937. Johnston died in January 1965 at age 97.

The Hammonds left Oklahoma for Texas. Mamie went into the oil and gas business selling oil field leases. She died in February 1962 at age 74. Hammonds' influence and consequent downfall lay in Johnston's trusting and loyal nature, her direct and manipulative personality, and friction between herself and the Oklahoma Legislature.