

## Biography: John Rogers Alford, Senior

John Rogers, son of Egbert Benson and Ella A. (Overton) Alford, was born 1 February 1885 at Overton, Rusk Co., TX. Five years later his family moved to Henderson, TX, where he lived the rest of his life, dying there 8 March 1960. He died unexpectedly about 1:30 PM on a Tuesday in Henderson Memorial Hospital. He had been at his office earlier in the day but went home complaining of feeling ill. He later collapsed and was taken to the hospital.

John's father, Egbert B. Alford, a prominent and successful merchant, sold plows and other useful articles. He told John, who worked in the store, that he ought to know how to use a plow if he was going to sell them. So John mixed some practical farming with his education in the Henderson High School and made a success as a real dirt farmer at the age of 15.

John held his first job at 14 as inspector and salesman of tomatoes, peaches, and watermelons for the East Texas Fruit & Truck Growers Association at Indianapolis, IN, and Pittsburgh, PA. At 22 he was a bookkeeper in the Farmers and Merchants National Bank and rose to become chairman of the board of the Citizens National Bank, its successor. At 26 he was a traveling salesman for Harris-Lipsitz Dry Goods Company of Dallas. He served as clerk, cotton buyer, and assistant manager of Irion & Alford and salesman for Mayfield-Alford Company. As a young man, he made many trips to New York to buy goods.

He was a captain in the Texas Cavalry in World War I. He was stationed at the army camp in San Antonio, TX, where many people died in the 1918 flu epidemic.

He engaged in the oil business in 1925 and was highly successful, acquiring many valuable oil royalties. He was involved financially with Henderson Cotton Oil Mill, Henderson Clay Products Company, Alford Brothers Motor Company, Boren Oil Company, Maco Oil Company, Texas Finance Company, and Tex-E-Lec Corporation, a manufacturer of wooden toys, and many other enterprises. He was president and chairman of the board of the Citizens National Bank of Henderson.

John married Susan LANDON on 5 September 1927. Susan was born 16 July 1893 and died 2 April 1976.

The following are excerpts, taken from a letter dated 16 May 1927 from J. W. Fitzgerald, Vice-president of The First Citizens National Bank of Tyler, TX, tell the story of how John and Susan met. The letter was addressed to Mr. Alford and Mr. English of Henderson.

*Miss Susan Landon, in the Educational Department, Texas Co-Operative Cotton Association, is spending this week in your county, and I am writing to urge that you show her every courtesy that you can conveniently. She is the daughter of a North Carolina farmer, a graduate of the University of North Carolina, and is spending her life in the interest of better farm home life. I met her first at A. & M. College Short Course last summer, and at once "fell in love with her", and later she spent one week in this county at my earnest request, and I have ever since been trying to arrange to get her to go into every school house in the county; and hope I may yet succeed. She has a wonderful message, calculated to inspire to higher and greater things in home life, and it will pay you all to take some interest in getting her a good*

*crowd and showing her other courtesies.*

*She is a real student, spent a month or two in Denmark and other European countries studying how farm life was transformed in those countries in just a few years; and, with her pleasing and strong personality, she can give those who hear her a vision of higher and better things, and at least the desire to attain them.*

John was a staunch Democrat and Methodist. He was a leader in Boy Scout work, on the advisory board of Southern Methodist University and of the Southwestern Medical College. He was a director of the Henderson Chamber of Commerce, member of the American Jersey Cattle Association, and of the Texas Hereford Association, Knights of Pythias, Woodmen of the World, Lions Club and many other business, civic, and fraternal organizations. He was president of the East Texas Chamber of Commerce in 1946. He was also a long time member of the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Texas. He was liberal in his views but believed strongly in the American free enterprise system.

He lent money to East Texas boys and girls to go to college and proudly claimed that he never lost a dollar on one of those loans.

John operated a 400-acre farm and dairy near Henderson. Through his efforts, along with other Rusk County agricultural leaders, a branch test plot of the Texas Research Foundation was established a mile south of Henderson in 1955. He was a director of that Foundation. For many years he was active in promoting soil and water conservation, reforestation, the growing of new crops, development of trench silos, pasture improvement,

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 and other farm practices. He planted his first pine trees in Rusk County in 1939, became a tree farmer in 1949 and was a member of the Texas Forestry Association. He was responsible for having the Headquarters, District 2, Texas Forest Service located in Henderson in 1953. In 1945 he was noted for planting crotalaria in strips with peanuts, where it served both to check wind and water erosion and to fertilize the soil it grows in. During the period 1947-49 he spearheaded the promotion of crimson clover as a grazing and soil-building crop. He and a friend underwrote the first carload of crimson clover seed brought to East Texas. In less than 15 years the hills of East Texas were blanketed with a crimson red cover.

At 75 years of age he was as active in

the affairs of his community and his state as he ever was in what men are wont to call the "prime of life." His last official act, less than two hours before he passed away, was typical of the man. He knew that the East Texas Chamber of Commerce was to hold a Tax Study Conference in Henderson, his home town, the following day, and he called the president of one of the service clubs of which he was a member and asked if they would not adjourn their luncheon and join with others in attending this conference.

John Rogers and Susan (Landon) Alford had three children:

- i. John Rogers Alford, Jr., born 1 August 1928 in TX; married (1) on 6 June 1953 Barbara Burke Shaw, who was born 24 November 1931. They divorced

and John married (2) on 10 May 1977 Marjorie Stewart Skloss, who was born 10 October 1936. They have four children; they were divorced in 1988.

- ii. Ella Langdon Alford, born 21 December 1931 in TX; married 18 July 1957 Bill McDonald, who was born 4 October 1929. They are divorced.
- iii. Egbert Landon Alford, born 11 July 1935 in TX; married 18 April 1957 Phyllis Potthast, who was born 29 March 1935. They have three children.

Source: This biography was prepared from various East Texas business and agricultural publications and news articles plus family group records supplied by Landon Alford.