

= Doris Sands Johnson =

Dame Doris Sands Johnson DBE (19 June 1921 ? 21 June 1983) was a Bahamian teacher , suffragette , and politician . She was the first Bahamian woman to contest an election in the Bahamas , the first female Senate appointee , and the first woman granted a leadership role in the Senate . Once in the legislature , she was the first female to be made a government minister and then was elected as the first woman President of the Senate . She was the first female to serve as Acting Governor General of the Bahamas , and was honored as Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II .

Born on New Providence Island , she completed her secondary education and became a teacher . After teaching for 17 years , Johnson returned to school to earn a master 's and doctorate degree in educational administration . During this period , she traveled back and forth between school and her Bahamian home organizing labor and suffrage efforts . Upon graduation , Johnson was unable to find work because of her activism . She made a compelling speech to the Bahamian legislature in 1959 , pleading for women 's suffrage and subsequently made a similar plea to the Colonial Office in London . Once the right to vote had been secured , Johnson immediately entered politics in 1961 , running in the first election in which women were allowed to participate . Though she lost her bid , she worked with the Progressive Liberal Party to gain Bahamian independence . When the country gained its freedom from colonial rule , Johnson was appointed to the Senate and served the government until her death , a decade later .

= = Background and education = =

Doris Louise Sands was born on 19 June 1921 in St. Agnes , New Providence , The Bahamas , to Sarah Elizabeth (née Fyne) and John Albert Sands . After completing her secondary education , Sands began teaching at the age of fifteen . On 3 January 1943 at Zion Baptist Church in Nassau , Sands married Ratal Allen Johnson . They subsequently had one son and Johnson worked for 17 years to earn the money to further her education . Around 1953 , she was able to enroll at Virginia Union University in Richmond , Virginia , graduating with a bachelor 's degree in education . She returned to the Bahamas in 1956 and joined the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) . Granted a four @-@ year government scholarship to further her education in Canada , Johnson enrolled in a master 's degree program in educational administration . Beginning her studies at MacDonald College of Education of McGill University , she earned her master 's degree and began work on her doctorate at the Ontario College of Education at the University of Toronto . In the midst of her studies , the government terminated the scholarship during her third year of studying abroad , under the guise that her master 's degree had been completed . Johnson believed that the scholarship was terminated because she had been active in organizing . She helped found the Women ? s Suffrage Movement in the Bahamas , and in 1958 both the Bahamian Federation of Labour and the National Council of Women , traveling home intermittently during her studies to work towards enfranchisement . She returned home , but was advised that the only available positions for teaching administrators were in outlying islands .

= = Political rise = =

Feeling that her employment opportunities were being blocked , that same year , on 19 January 1959 , Johnson asked to address the members of the Bahamian House of the Assembly , but was told she could only speak after the session adjourned , to which she agreed . In her speech , she pointed out that a petition had been submitted to the House in 1958 for suffrage , which Members had claimed showed only 13 petitioners and 529 signatories . She provided mimeographed copies showing the actual number was 2 @,@ 829 people and included people from Abaco , Andros , Cat Island , Eleuthera , Exuma , Grand Bahama , Long Island , and New Providence . She went on to complain that women were being taxed without representation and reasoned that should the vote not be extended to them , they should no longer have to pay taxes . She insisted that women were

working members of society and were ready , willing , and able to participate as full citizens . Though the Members of Parliament were impressed with the speech , they did nothing .

In 1960 , Johnson , as leader of the Women 's Suffrage Movement , and Eugenia Lockhart , the organization 's secretary , went to London to plead the case for suffrage . They met with the London branch of the International Alliance of Women to discuss the situation in the Bahamas , claiming that though they had the support of the majority of Bahamian women , many women could not voice their approval because they were employed by merchants and the government who were opposed to the cause . They also sought an audience at the Colonial Office to air their grievances , accompanied by the chairman of the PLP , Henry Milton Taylor . They met with the Secretary of State for the Colonies , Iain Macleod , and two women British Parliamentarians , Baroness Joan Vickers and Baroness Eirene White . The Bahamians were assured that their case was accepted and that change would soon follow . They returned , but no change was forthcoming .

Supporters rallied and collected funds for Johnson to complete her education in the United States , and she enrolled at New York University , completing her Doctor of Education in 1962 . When suffrage passed in 1961 , Johnson immediately entered the fray , accepting a nomination as a PLP candidate for the Eleuthera District . She wrote a booklet entitled *The Next Step : Votes for Women* in which she explained useful information for voting , such as how to register to vote and cast a ballot . She lost the race , but three years later participated in a debate in the push for majority rule on the parliamentary imbalance in the Bahamas with a delegation from the PLP at the United Nations . At that meeting , she met the president of her alma mater from Virginia Union , and agreed to accept a teaching post at Southern University in Baton Rouge , Louisiana . A little over a year later , Johnson left Louisiana and came back to the Bahamas to participate in the 1967 elections . The PLP won the majority of seats and she became the first woman appointee to serve in the Bahamian Senate . One of her first acts was to form a committee to help the Haitian diaspora who had fled to the Bahamas because of unrest in their own country . With an estimated 20 @, @ 000 to 30 @, @ 000 refugees and a government decree to stop issuing work permits to Haitians , the situation was critical . The following year , PLP had a landslide victory in the 1968 election and Johnson was reappointed to the Senate , and appointed as the first woman to lead government business .

From 1968 to 1973 , Johnson was the Transportation Minister and her appointment was the first time a woman had served in the Bahamian Cabinet . In 1972 , Johnson published a book entitled *The Quiet Revolution in the Bahamas* , which discussed the struggle for racial parity and independence , likening the efforts in the Bahamas to the American Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King 's fight . The book has been called " one of the most important accounts of the events and personalities involved in the attainment of Majority Rule and Independence in The Bahamas " . The following year , when the Bahama 's gained independence from Britain , Johnson resigned from her post as Minister and was elected as the first female President of the Senate . In 1977 , shortly after being reelected to the presidency , Johnson received Queen Elizabeth II . In 1979 , she briefly served as acting Governor General of the Bahamas , the first woman ever to do so , and that same year was honored as Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire .

Besides her official roles , Johnson served as a founding member of the Bahamas Folklore Group and spoke at various women 's groups in the Bahamas and United States . She also served as president of the National Women 's Housing Association and coordinator of the Bahamas Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention 's Women 's Auxiliary .

Johnson died on 21 June 1983 . Posthumously , a high school was dedicated in 2002 in Nassau , which bears her name .

= = Selected works = =

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