

Foster, Mrs. James M.; Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana
Submitted by Mike Miller

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Foster, Mrs. James M., nee Eleanor Long, was one of the most distinguished and brilliant women of Louisiana. She was born at Natchitoches. Her father, Dr. William Long, was a native of Ireland and graduate of Trinity college, Dublin. Coming to America before he had reached the age of 20, he graduated from a Philadelphia medical college and, in early manhood, came to Louisiana and located in Natchitoches for the practice of medicine. Later he became extensively engaged in planting and merchandising at Natchitoches. He married there in 1840 Miss Emily C. Boggs, a native of Berkeley county, Va., and a member of a prominent Virginia family, being the daughter of the Rev. Dr. John Boggs, a distinguished Presbyterian divine and a graduate of Princeton University. On her maternal side, Mrs. Foster was a direct descendant of Col. Ellis Cooke, who commanded a battalion in the Revolutionary war, and who was a warm personal friend of George Washington. Her mother died when she was a small child, and she and her only brother, John Long, were the tender charges, in their childhood, of a devoted aunt, who rendered valuable aid to Dr. Long in his care of his motherless children. When quite a young girl Mrs. Foster was sent to Mansfield college, then one of the leading institutions of the South. From this college she was graduated with distinguished honors. When barely 17 years of age she became the bride of the late James M. Foster, at that time a prominent young planter of Caddo parish. Mr. and Mrs. Foster lived for a number of years on the plantation, and 3 children were born unto them, and when the time came to think of their education the parents removed to Shreveport to live, and took up their abode at "Curraghmuir," the well-known Foster home, which was for years the center of delightful hospitality. Eleven children were born unto Mr. and Mrs. Foster, and here at "Curraghmuir" Mrs. Foster "sang to her nest," devoting her time and wonderful talents to the upbringing of her children, who were destined to become identified with the highest social and literary life of Louisiana and other states. Mrs. Foster was a woman of many brilliant accomplishments, whose keen wit and great social experience made her notable in any company. She was forceful and of a judicial temperament, yet not one of those unpleasantly aggressive women. Her decision of character and modest insistence made it easy for her to accomplish her ends in her club work, at those periods of decided difference which sometimes arise. Hers was an influence always recognized in adjustment and pacification. Her services were not confined to local movements; she was well known in state and national assemblies. She addressed the George Washington society as the president for Louisiana at its national meeting, and made a well remembered address in New York to the Sorosis club, of which she was a distinguished

guest. She was the first president of Hypatia club, the first club established in North Louisiana, and the first president of the Federation of Women's clubs of Louisiana, the first regent of the Pelican chapter, D. A. R., of Shreveport, and she was the vice-state regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Mrs. Foster was an ardent Daughter of the Confederacy, and for a number of years she was president of the Home for the Homeless at Shreveport. Her greatest and proudest work was founding the Old Ladies' home, and realizing the crowning success of her efforts toward erecting the building which now serves as their abiding place at Shreveport. It was at her request that generous donors made this home possible. She was closely connected with every literary, educational, civic and charitable enterprise of her home city. She graced few social functions, as her charity and home work kept her wholly occupied, but whenever she did attend, no matter what the affair or its character, she was always one of the accepted and honored guests. Like a grande dame of the olden times, she commanded attention without commanding it; she ruled without ruling. This remarkable woman and devoted mother of 11 children was an inspiration, a helper, broad in sympathy, optimistic in temperament, fair of face and mind and heart. In youth there stretched before her great promise which the fruitful years fulfilled. Hers was an urgent life, and she met its multitudinous demands with the courtesy of one to the manor born and the graciousness of the Christian gentlewoman. She died at her home, "Curraghmuir," Nov. 16, 1910. "She passed away like a beautiful flower, whose petals one by one drop at the touch of a summer zephyr." Like a tired child she crept into her Maker's arms. A bride at 17, a mother at 18, when she felt life slipping away from her she thought not of honor or glory or the passing show of this world; she said: "Let me have my children about me." When she had gathered them once again under her wings, the loving heart ceased its troubling and the spirit ascended up to the heights. Of her 11 children 4 died in childhood and 7 reached their majority and 5 survive her. All of them have attained prominence in one or another walk of life, and all acknowledge their debt to her and the lessons they learned at her knees. One of her sons, Claiborne Lee Foster, graduated at West Point in 1888 and died in 1890. He was one of 4 cadet captains at the Academy of West Point. Another son, John Gray Foster, closely followed the death of his father in answering the summons of death. He was a brilliant young man of great promise. The elder of the 2 living sons is Hon. William Long Foster. He is the eldest of the 5 surviving children of Mrs. Foster. He is a prominent cotton planter of Caddo Parish, and was formerly railroad commissioner for his district in Louisiana. A personal sketch of the younger son, now living Hon. James M. Foster immediately follows this of his mother. The three living daughters of Mrs. Foster are Lucille, the wife of former Governor Benton McMillin of Tennessee, who served for 20 years in Congress and was the author of the income tax law during President Cleveland's administration, and is now minister to Peru under the appointment of President Wilson; Mrs. M. E. Foster-Comegys, now residing in New York City, has 3 daughters who have histrionic talent; and T. Olive Foster, now living in Shreveport, and who looks after and manages a plantation which she inherited from her father.

Source: Louisiana: Comprising Sketches of Parishes, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form (volume 3), pp. 171-173. Edited by Alc e Fortier, Lit.D. Published in 1914, by Century Historical Association.

The original source includes a beautiful facsimilie of the subject of this sketch.