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## THE MOORE-RHETT FAMILY

Few families have shaped the economic and social structures of Huntsville, whether in its financial, industrial, business, or agricultural activities, more than the Moore-Rhett family. Its lineage can be traced to the town's first substantial landowners, its quiet influence felt today in the progressive city it so ably helped to create.

The family's roots go back to Dr. David Moore, born in Brunswick County, Virginia, in 1779. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine he moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he became a friend of and personal physician to General Andrew Jackson. He later served as surgeon on Jackson's staff during the bloody Creek Indian War in southern Alabama.

Dr. Moore moved to Huntsville in 1808, and a year later, at the first sale of lands in Madison County, then part of the Mississippi Territory, he became a considerable purchaser. Dr. Moore was selected as one of three trustees to whom Leroy Pope deeded half of his purchase of the Huntsville site, with authority to plot and sell lots. Proceeds from the sale were used for the improvements of the projected town.

Dr. Moore was appointed one of five "justices of the quorum" for Madison County, Alabama, an English and Virginia method of administering the law. Thus began a life of service to the town that would become Huntsville.

In December 1816 Dr. Moore was one of nine citizens authorized to open books of subscription for the Planters' and Merchants' Bank at Huntsville, the first bank established in the Mississippi Territory.

In 1819, a year after Alabama

was admitted to the Union as a state, Dr. Moore was elected to the Alabama Legislature, and was returned 13 times. Although from 1822 to 1825 he was sent to the state senate, he preferred the lower chamber, where he was unanimously elected speaker in 1841. In addition to his medical and political careers, Dr. Moore put faith in land and in the planting of cotton in Madison and Limestone counties, Alabama, and in Noxubee County, Mississippi. He owned and managed nine plantations. He died in 1845, the father of three sons and three daughters, two of each of whom lived to adulthood.

Colonel Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr., the son of the South Carolina statesman who succeeded John C. Calhoun in the United States Senate, was born in Charleston in 1828. An 1849 graduate of Harvard College, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and president of the Hasty Pudding Club, Rhett was admitted to the bar in 1851 in South Carolina.

He married Josephine Harton of Huntsville, and became a rice planter in the Colleton district of South Carolina in 1853. He purchased the *Charleston Mercury* newspaper, and in 1857 gave up planting to edit the paper, which quickly became the leading political organ of the southern states. Colonel Rhett was elected to the South Carolina Legislature, where he led the successful fight for South Carolina's secession from the Union.

His first wife died in 1860. In 1867 he was married for the second time to Harriet Moore Barnard, of Huntsville, a widow and a daughter of Dr. David Moore. In 1870 the couple left South Carolina to settle in Huntsville, where he became a prominent cotton planter and became active in state political

affairs. He was appointed a trustee of the University of Alabama. Colonel Rhett died in 1905.

Harry Moore Rhett, the son of Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr., and grandson of Robert Barnwell Rhett and Dr. David Moore, was born in Huntsville in 1873. After receiving his early education in Huntsville, he attended boarding school at Marion Military Institute, and then entered the University of Alabama. He transferred to the University of Virginia, from which he graduated in 1895. After graduate school at the Eastman Business College in New York, he returned to Huntsville.

He married Marie Louise Rison in 1904, whose great-grandfather, Archibald Rison, a manufacturer of cotton gins, had come to Huntsville in 1822, 14 years after Dr. David Moore became one of the town's settlers. Louise Rison's grandfather, William R. Rison, with Colonel Samuel Fordyce, founded the Rison-Fordyce Bank in Huntsville in 1866. In 1879 Rison purchased Fordyce's interest in the bank, which was renamed the W.R. Rison Banking Company. In 1948 that bank merged with the First National Bank of Huntsville, now the First Alabama Bank of Huntsville, N.A. The Rison family was also prominent in Huntsville's textile industry, which boosted the town's economy in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Harry Moore Rhett, who maintained an agricultural program on the Moore-Rhett family's farmland during his entire business career, quickly immersed himself in the financial, industrial, and business activities of Huntsville. He was president of Rison Banking Company; vice-president and general manager of the Dallas Manufacturing Company, a mill that manufactured cotton sheeting;

and vice-president of Planters' Warehouse and Storage Company, which was engaged in cotton warehousing. He gave the land on which stands the present Huntsville Hospital. He died in 1948.

The beginning of Huntsville's rapid surge in growth came with the 1950s. That expansion resulted in the development of the Moore-Rhett lands stretching from Governors Drive to Drake Avenue, from Whitesburg Drive to Leeman Ferry Road. Today the family still owns property and farmlands deeded from that original 1809 government land sale to Dr. David Moore.

Harry Moore Rhett and Marie Louise Rison had two sons, William Richard Rison Rhett, who died at the age of four, and Harry Moore Rhett, Jr.

Educated at Culver Military Academy, Washington and Lee University, and the Harvard Business School, Harry Moore Rhett, Jr., following service in the United States Army in World War II, returned to his native Huntsville to work at the Rison Banking Company. Soon he was engaged in other business interests, including an active farm program and property and investment management.

He has quietly contributed to the social progress and economic well-being of his community, having served as chairman of the City of Huntsville Gas Utility Board, City of Huntsville Water Utility Board, Huntsville Hospital Board of Control, Huntsville Hospital Foundation, Madison County Board of Registrars, Marshall Space Flight Center Community Advisory Committee, and the Randolph School Board of Trustees. He has served as president of the Huntsville Industrial Expansion

Committee, Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association, Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce, which in 1973 gave him its Distinguished Citizen's Award, and as senior warden of the Episcopal Church of the Nativity. He has been a member of the board of directors of

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*The portrait is of Dr. David Moore, great-grandfather of Harry Moore Rhett, Jr. He was surgeon and personal physician to General Andrew Jackson during the bloody Creek Indian War in southern Alabama, and a considerable purchaser at the first sale of lands in Madison County in 1809, when it was still part of the Mississippi Territory.*

the First Alabama Bank of Huntsville since 1948 and of its holding company, First Alabama Bancshares, Inc.

He and his wife, Sharon Barbour Rhett, daughter of United States Senator William Warren Barbour of New Jersey, had four children: Louise Rison Rhett, Harry Moore Rhett III, William Warren Barbour Rhett, and Leslie Carrere Rhett.

The community commitment and influences of the Moore-Rhett family seem assured in the years to come by these great-great-grandchildren of Dr. David Moore and Robert Barnwell Rhett.

