

## Royster, Fred Stovall <sup>[1]</sup>

### Royster, Fred Stovall

by Stephen E. Massengill, 1994

**31 Dec. 1908–3 June 1972**

Fred Stovall Royster, tobacco warehouseman, legislator, and tobacco industry promoter, was born in the community of [Dabney](#) <sup>[2]</sup> in western [Vance County](#) <sup>[3]</sup>. His parents were John Stovall (24 May 1869–23 Oct. 1923), a farmer, merchant, and sheriff of Vance County, and Alvada Green Royster, natives of [Granville County](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. He was the grandson of John Henry and Esther Anne Stovall Royster, also of Granville. Two of his relatives, Beverly S. Royster and Thomas Sampson Royster, represented Granville County in the General Assembly.

Royster attended the public schools of Vance County and was graduated from Henderson High School in 1924. His family had moved into [Henderson](#) <sup>[5]</sup> around 1922 but had retained ownership of its four-hundred-acre farm near Dabney. Royster was enrolled at [Duke University](#) <sup>[6]</sup> in 1926 but was forced to withdraw when hail destroyed much of the family tobacco crop.

He took a position in a Henderson tobacco warehouse and was engaged in the tobacco industry for the remainder of his life. Between 1927 and 1937 Royster farmed and was employed in several tobacco warehouses, including the Young and Daniel establishment. He acquired an interest in that business in 1938 and operated various warehouses until 1957. Royster also was a fertilizer salesman for the Virginia-Carolina Chemical Corporation from 1937 to 1957.

Around 1943 Royster, along with other flue-cured auction warehousemen, had become interested in forming a trade organization to regulate and oversee the marketing of tobacco. As a result of that sentiment, the Bright Belt Warehouse Association, Inc., was formed in 1945. Royster was appointed full-time director and served in that capacity until his death. Between 1954 and 1972 the headquarters of the Bright Leaf Warehouse Association, Inc., was located at the Carolina Warehouse in Henderson. The association became the most influential warehouse organization in the United States. Its membership was composed of the majority of auction warehouses that sold flue-cured, Bright tobacco in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

During his term as managing director of the association Royster emerged as one of the strongest supporters of the tobacco industry. He favored flue-cured acreage-poundage control and price supports and advocated co-operation among farmers, warehousemen, buyers, the U.S. Stabilization Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His contributions to the industry were not confined to the trade association but covered the entire scope of tobacco programs from their operation to their defense. Royster particularly was adamant in his support of the cigarette industry during the antismoking campaigns of the 1960s.

Due to his many accomplishments in the industry, Royster was known widely as "Mr. Tobacco." He also served as president, Henderson Tobacco Board of Trade (1940–45); member, North Carolina Tobacco Advisory Council (1945–72); director, vice-president, president, and chairman of the board, Tobacco Tax Council (1949–72); and member, Council for Tobacco Research (1954–72), Tobacco Growers Information Committee (1958–72), and National Tobacco Industry Advisory Committee, [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) <sup>[7]</sup> (1962–72).

Royster first entered the political arena as chairman of the Vance County Board of Elections from 1934 to 1936. He then was elected to four consecutive terms as a state representative (1945–51) but failed in his bid to become speaker of the house in 1951. Royster also served two terms as state senator (1953 and 1965–66). As a legislator he not only supported tobacco legislation but also favored increased appropriations for schools and roads. He served as chairman of the house committees on roads, agriculture, and health and of the senate committee on education and agriculture. In addition, he was a member of the state Democratic executive committee and was mentioned often as a possible candidate for appointment to national office. At the state level he was director of the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation, chairman of the North Carolina Personnel Council, and chairman of the North Carolina Merit System Council. Of national importance, Royster held membership on the board of governors and administrative committee of the National Highway Users Conference.

Royster married Launah Parker of Mooresville on 4 Jan. 1942. They had no children.

Despite his time-consuming business and political activities, Royster was associated with many fraternal, civic, educational, and religious organizations. He served as director of Henderson Savings and Loan Association and was a trustee of Maria Parham Hospital in Henderson. He also was director and vice-president of the [North Carolina State University Foundation](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and helped sponsor the Royster-Parker Scholarship Fund for [High Point College](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, [Meredith College](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, and Vance-Granville Technical Institute. He was director of the Vance County Chamber of Commerce from 1940 to 1948 and was a member of the [Masonic order](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, Rotary Club, and Elks Club. A member of the Methodist church,

Royster was chairman of the board of stewards and served on the committees of finance and pastor-parish relations.

He died of complications brought on by diabetes at Duke Medical Center in [Durham](#) <sup>[12]</sup> and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Henderson.

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## Authors:

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[Durham](#) <sup>[22]</sup>

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[Guilford County](#) <sup>[26]</sup>

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[North Carolina State University](#) <sup>[34]</sup>

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