

WILLIAM E. JOHNSON
McDonough, N.Y.

April 21, 1943

T.F.A. Williams
Lincoln, Neb.

My Dear Williams:

Your letter calling attention to the original letter written my Father in 1857 catches me with my pants down. That letter with a few others has been mislaid and can't find it where it ought to be or anywhere else. So I am a candidate for severe punishment good and plenty. I will continue the search, however.

But as you appear to crave other historical items, I am sending you herewith some notes that you or Sheldon may find to be of value.

I find a clipping from the New Voice of October 2, 1902 containing a yarn that I wrote and includes a picture of the very house that Father built with his own hand. The picture in the middle of the group is the "house that Father built". I think that it was torn down many years ago.

In later years, at times I have amused myself by writing to real estate folks in Omaha asking the value of those lots. During the wild craze of the Eighties, the value was reported as \$450 a front foot. Later when the depression came along, it was reported as worth \$100 a front foot.

When I have gathered the material, I will comply with your request to furnish some data regarding the former Mrs. Johnson. She was of Swiss or German descent, I think, but have not the data to report anything.

Faithfully

W.E. Johnson

WILLIAM E. JOHNSON
McDonough, N.Y.

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T.F.A. Williams
Lincoln, Neb.

My Dear Williams:

On March 15, 1857, my Father left Coventry, bound for the west, seeking a suitable place to locate some land warrants, pre-emption opportunities and soldiers claims growing out of the war of 1812. He was later joined by "an old acquaintance" Ezra Conant. The two worked together in partnership for several years. They travelled by rail by way of Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Alton, St. Louis and Jefferson City, that being the western terminus of rail traffic. Thence they travelled by steamboat to Kansas, stopping at Lawrence, Lecompton and Kansas City. Emigration was "very great" and accommodations at two dollars per day were "poor". So we decided to "skip out and leave more room for the rest". So the pair went up the Missouri river to Omaha. They travelled for a week in northwestern Iowa. They found neighbors from seven to fourteen miles apart. To get a letter from home took two weeks. At Omaha, the two got a job at carpenter work at three dollars per day.

For nearly four years, Father and Conant worked together for the most part, carpentering and contracting. Later they were joined by Father's brother Albert who joined them in locating several tracts of land, part of which still continues in their descendents.

Some of the activities of the brothers were in outfitting prospectors headed for Pikes Peak in quest of gold, "Pike's Peak or Bust" was the popular slogan of the time. The city was almost devoid of women and Indian marauders became a nuisance. The red skins would walk in and wander about in SEARCH OF FOOD but usually did no damage.

At Father's boarding house a scheme was devised to discourage Indians from walking in unannounced. The landlord, just before dinner time when the redskins were expected, heated a small fire shovel almost red hot. When the Indians came in unannounced as usual, they were met by the landlord who proceeded to pat them on their bare shoulders with the hot shovel. That effectually cured the Indians from entering, unexpectedly, that particular boarding house. Thus Father and his fellow workmen were thus enabled to eat their dinner in peace.

On one occasion, Father was engaged in moving a house. He had it out in the street when he was served with an injunction forbidding further operations, the ownership of the house was in dispute. Father took the papers to a lawyer, A.J. Poppleton, around the corner. Father told Poppleton that he had been enjoined by the court from moving the house.

"What will happen to me if I disregard the injunction?" he asked. "They will put you in jail", replied Poppleton, without stopping to write a letter that he was writing.

"How much do I owe you for this advice"?

"Oh, about three dollars", quoth the attorney. Father paid and came away.

At that period of Omaha history, there was no sewerage installment of any kind whatever. Every householder got along as best he could and small makeshift privies were scattered over the "city". One night a heavy windstorm spread over the landscape. In the gale most of the privies were blown over.

At noon, Father and a bunch of his men were on their way to dinner and, as they passed Poppleton's office, the lawyer was struggling with his privy trying to get it right side up.

"Hey, Johnson, wont you have your men set this thing right side up?"

"Sure", replied Father, and straightway a couple of them proceeded to place the monstrosity where it belonged, with the expenditure of less than two minutes time.

"How much do I owe you", asked the lawyer.

"Oh, about three dollars", quoth Father, suppressing a grin. Poppleton paid, relishing the joke.

Poppleton later entered Nebraska history as one of its greatest lawyers.

After nearly four years absence, Father came back to New York to renew his acquaintance with his family, that then constituted one girl, Bessie Algerose Johnson, besides his wife and the Mother. In winding up his affairs preparatory to his departure from Omaha he found one man who owed him sixty dollars for moving a house and which had not been paid and no prospects of its ever being paid. He met the delinquent debtor on the streets and stopped for a talk. "Haven't you any old thing that you can give me for the sixty dollars"?, Father asked.

"All that I have that might do you any good is a little piece of ground out in the country. I will give you that for the debt". "All right", replied Father, and the deal was consummated. Father did not even go to see the property.

In later years, real estate men began inquiring about what Father would take for the "land" and further inquiry led to Father going back to Omaha to see what it was all about. He found that there was some real value and rented the homestead at Smithville, New York. He platted the little tract into six lots and built with his own hands a small house on the corner lot. That corner is now at twenty-fourth and Farnham Street, right in the heart of the city. That little house was still standing, at least until few years ago. In one way and another, Father sold those six lots at about a thousand dollars each. So that original debt was liquidated bringing in some six thousand

dollars for the debt of sixty dollars. My recollection is that the deals looking to the liquidating were negotiated through the firm of Caldwell, Hamilton & Co. My recollection is that Hamilton was a friend of Father's and once loaned him money to start a grocery store. My recollection may be faulty as to this, however.

At any rate this was a goodly return for the original sixty dollars that was harvested from the original debt.

Faithfully,

William E. Johnson