



*The Johnson Family;  
The Johnson Mill  
A Tradition*



## INTRODUCTION

*In 1956, I married into the Johnson family of 'Johnson Switch.'*

*Having been reared in a history loving family, the pure raw courage of the Johnson ancestors to pull up stakes in Tennessee and make new lives for themselves in Arkansas fascinated me.*

*Spending every family gathering listening to Frank and Dayne talk about the family and occasionally hearing their cousins enter into the 'telling' was a delight.*

*In 1991, as the INN AT THE MILL was being built, I felt now was the time to write the story and see it in print.*

*I hope you will enjoy reading about the Johnsons and if you would like more information about the family, please write to: MEJ, 4912 Trout Farm Rd., Springdale, AR 72762.*

*The story of the Johnson family  
as written December, 1991 by Mary Ellen  
Johnson, wife of Marion Leroy Johnson,  
son of Dayne and Mamie (Wilson) Johnson.*

**Top photo: Johnson Mill, 1976**

**Bottom Photo: Typical Johnson family gathering on the porch of the Johnson House when Frank and Edith (Hinshaw) resided in the house.**

Sparks of anger and frustration flew from Frank Johnson's eyes as the deputy sheriff questioned him the day a thief stole the bell from over the front gate to the Johnson House.

"Can you identify the person who took your bell, Mr. Johnson?" Asked the young man.

"Mister, If I had seen him you wouldn't have to ask, he would be laying out here, shot." For years Frank would talk about that day with strong feelings. The family really believed he just might have done it had he seen the bell being taken.

Frank and Edith Johnson were proud of the cast iron dinner bell hanging over the front gate of the two-story brick house J. Q. Johnson built shortly after the Civil War.

The bell was in excellent working condition and Frank kept it painted aluminum color so it would shine.

One day at noon, while Edith and Frank sat in the kitchen of the Johnson House eating lunch, a thief robbed them of this family treasure.

Frank missed it immediately as he went through the gate returning to work at the mill across the road from the house.

This incident is typical of the strong nature of the Johnson men, self-made men of character and stamina when faced with adversity.

A proud, loyal family man, Frank kept family stories and traditions alive for the younger generations of Johnson's. Much of what the family knows of their

heritage has come from Frank's telling and scraps of information he collected over the years.

In 1889, Goodspeed's Publishing House, Chicago, Illinois, sent circuit riders through northwest Arkansas (and many other places) collecting biographies and histories for books they printed. Called "Goodspeed's" these books are often a family's only source documenting ancestors. The Johnson family was one family biography found in Goodspeed's.

Our story begins with Frank Johnson's paternal great-grandparents, James and Mary Queener Johnson.

James and Mary (Queener) Johnson came from Campbell County, Tennessee, in the early 1850s to southern Missouri and shortly thereafter to northwest Arkansas.

James was born in 1799 either in North Carolina or Virginia. The family has not verified his place of birth at this time. He fought in the Black Hawk War in 1832 and Goodspeed's reported that he fought with "great credit to his country."

Mary Queener was born September 29, 1803 in Campbell County, Tennessee. It was in this county James met Mary and later they were married here. James served as a Justice of the Peace for several terms and as Sheriff for one term.

James, 55 and Mary, 51 had become parents of ten children, all of whom were about grown when the family pulled up stakes and headed west.

Two of the boys, Jacob Queener (J. Q.) and Benjamin Franklin (B. F.) came on to Arkansas with the family but some of the older adult married children stayed in Missouri.

Our story centers around the two brothers, J. Q. who was 22 years old and B. F. who was 16 in 1854 when the family arrived in Washington County, Arkansas.

One can only imagine the fun and excitement these two young men had on the trail. Traveling by teams of oxen pulling wagons, crossing the Mississippi on barges, swimming the teams across smaller rivers and creeks, and seeing new country every day as the family forged westward.

The Butterfield Overland Stage connected Fayetteville, Arkansas, commercially with the rest of the world in the early 1850s. It was just a few years prior to the Civil War (began in 1861) so talk of secession, discussions of states rights to choose how they would deal with the slavery issue, and political standpoints of the time must have been on their minds and tongues. The Johnson family has always been interested in politics. Much later in his life, B. F. went to Little Rock (the state capitol) with a railroad lobbying group.

Two sisters from Madison County, Rietta and Nancy Boatright caught the eyes of the Johnson brothers and soon they were married, J. Q. married Rietta and B. F. married Nancy.

Goodspeed's reported the families as living under the "paternal" roof, so we assume that the boys stayed on to help their father with the family farm.

Nancy gave birth to four children before she died in 1863 but only two lived, J. O. (Oliver) and Mary L.

The Civil War was raging when Nancy died.

J. Q. and B. F. had chosen the side of the Federal Army, joined Company B, First Regiment, Arkansas Calvary under Col. Harrison.

B. F. was shot in the left arm during a skirmish at White Oak. J. Q. was more fortunate and came home totally uninjured.

In 1864, Lydia Lewis, daughter of wealthy Middle Fork mill owner George Lewis, became B. F.'s new bride and took over the care and raising of B. F. and Nancy's two surviving children.

Frank McConnell wrote about the wedding supper, "Mr. Johnson was still in the military service when he married his second wife July 24, 1864. She was Lydia Lewis, daughter of George W. and Lettie Mills Lewis. An elaborate wedding supper was prepared at the home of George W. Lewis. The Confederates heard about this and went to the home of Mr. Lewis thinking they might capture Ben Johnson. News of their coming had already reached the Lewis home and Johnson, without the supper, made his escape as the women folks hurriedly hid the supper in the 'loft' as the second story was called in those days.

The Confederate force, under the command of Captain 'Tuck' Smith arrived as expected and proceeded to eat what they thought was the wedding supper. Captain Smith went out of his way to thank Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. B. F. Ramey, and the bride for the 'good supper' they had prepared, only to be told that the real supper had been hidden from them."

The war ended and once again the Johnson family turned their attention to rearing children and making a living. Lydia and B. F. had 13 children which they raised on a 1,000 acre farm in the Middle Fork valley southeast of Fayetteville. Here they built a brick home which at that time was frequently called a 'mansion.'

The acquiring of the land and building of the house took several years and the story has been told down through the years that B. F. refused to wear any under garments as long as he was in debt. Perhaps being uncomfortable reminded him of the indebtedness.

J. Q. and Rietta turned their attentions towards a small community laying between Fayetteville and Springdale (formerly Shiloh) where a mill site remained after the Confederate forces burned the original mill. The community was later named Johnson.

Bobbie Byars Lynch, a noted area historian, wrote an article titled, "Early Mills of Washington County" where she talked about the origins of what later became the Johnson Mill.

Lynch noted some 1834 surveyor's field notes gave the name, Truesdale Mill to the location which in 1860 was known as Sutton's Mill.

Sutton's Mill, which belonged to Seneca Sutton's widow, Isabella Sutton, was listed in the Arkansas Products of Industry Census for 1860 as being valued at \$10,000 and processed \$40,000 worth of grain per year.

[A note of interest, Isabella Sutton was the first appointed postmistress in the area of what is known today as the town of Johnson.]

In November, 1865, a deed was filed transferring the mill property, with 'improvements and appurtenances' to William, Samuel and Lucinda Mayes and Jacob Q. and Rhett J. Johnson. [Ed. note: the spelling of Rietta's names changes several times on various documents.]

Two years later, 1867, J. Q. Johnson registered as the miller of 'Spring Mill.' It is believed reconstructing the present mill took about two years.

In 1880, J. Q. and Rietta, bought the Mayes family's share in the mill and it became known as the 'Johnson Mill', a name it carried for the next 111 years.

J. Q. was 61 years old and B. F. was 54 when their biographies were published in Goodspeed's.

Reprinted from Goodspeed's History of Northwest  
Arkansas, 1889:

Benjamin F. Johnson. Among the most successful farmers and stock dealers and prominent citizens of Washington County, Ark., may be mentioned B. F. Johnson, who was born in Campbell County, Tenn., on the 12th of March, 1835. He is a son of James and Mary (Queener) Johnson, natives of Virginia and Tennessee, respectively. The father was born January 4, 1799. Mary (Queener) Johnson was born September 29, 1803, and died May 22, 1876. The father was a farmer by occupation, and was a soldier in the War of 1812. While a resident of Tennessee he held the office of justice of the peace for several terms, and was county sheriff one term. He was an old-line Whig in politics, and was married in Campbell County, Tenn., coming to Washington County, Ark., in 1850, where he spent the remainder of his days, dying May 6, 1882. He and wife became the parents of ten children, seven of whom are living: O. P., a farmer and miller, residing in Missouri; Lucinda, wife of J. R. Hope; Lovisa, wife of D. Hope; Mary, wife of W. Alexander; J. Q., Benjamin F. and Eliza. Benjamin F. remained under the paternal roof until he attained his majority, when he engaged in farming on his own responsibility, and by close application to the duties of farm life he established those habits of industry and frugality which insured his success in after life. He has been actively engaged as a dealer in stock for many years, and in all his business dealings he is fair and just, commanding the respect and confidence of all who know him; he commenced life with no capital but his two hands and a vast amount of energy and pluck, but is now the owner of 932 acres of land, and has one of the finest residences in the county. He is a notable example of those sound and correct business principles which win success and those genial traits of character which secure and retain public confidence and esteem. He took an active part in the late war, and served for over three years as sergeant of Company D, First Arkansas Regiment, operating the most of the time in Missouri and Arkansas. He participated in more than 100 battles and skirmishes, and was quite severely wounded in the left arm in a skirmish on White Oak. His marriage to Miss Nancy K. Boatwright took place October 1, 1858. She was born February 27, 1839, in Anderson County, Tenn., and died May 26, 1864, in Washington County, Ark., having been the mother of four children, two living: J. O. and Mary L., wife of Joseph Arnett. Mr. Johnson's second marriage was to Miss Lydia Lewis, by whom he became the father of fourteen children, seven of whom are still living: George W., Lydia K., Hugh L., Shirley J., Lettie, Burtos B. and Inez. Mr. Johnson is a strong supporter of the principles of the Republican party, and is a member of the G. A. R. He has always been a strong advocate of public improvements, and has given several hundred dollars to aid in the construction of railroads in his county, and throughout life has taken a deep interest in all enterprises tending to benefit the county and the cause of education.



WASHINGTON COUNTY.

BIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX.

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Jacob Q. Johnson, one of the wealthy and successful citizens of Washington County, Ark., and the son of James and Mary (Queener) Johnson, was born in East Tennessee in 1828. The father was a native of North Carolina, and was of Dutch descent. He took an active part in the Black Hawk War, and served with great credit to his country. He was a farmer and miller by occupation, and moved from Tennessee to Arkansas in 1851, where he followed farming for some time. He located nine miles south of Fayetteville, and here he died in 1883, from injuries received from falling down stairs. His son, Jacob Q., was educated in his native State, and remained with his father until the war broke out, but previous to to this, in 1852, he married Miss R. J., daughter of C. H. Boatright, of Madison County, and to them were born thirteen children, nine now living: Mary Jane, Tennessee, J. Q., Harriet Eliza, Edna K., Catherine, Susan J., Benjamin F. and Dora H. In 1862 Mr. Johnson enlisted in the Federal army, Company B, First Regiment Arkansas Cavalry, commanded by Col. Harrison, and served three years, three months and seven days. He was in the battle of Prairie Grove, was also in several skirmishes, but was never wounded or taken prisoner. After the war Mr. Johnson purchased his present home, which is one of the finest in the Northwest, and upon this farm he has erected a fine two-story brick residence, valued at \$4,000, also a large saw-mill, with grist-mill and flouring-mill attached, which is run by a thirty-six foot water-wheel. The water is brought a distance of 500 yards to run the wheel. Mr. Johnson has also steam power attached to run the mill when the water is low or the mill is frozen up. This mill is valued at \$20,000. Besides this Mr. Johnson is the owner of 800 acres of valuable land, and has over 200 acres under the plow. He is a member of the G. A. R., is a member of the Baptist Church, and is one of the most respected and enterprising citizens of the county.

Burtis Benjamin (B. B.) Johnson was the youngest son of B. F. and Lydia. B. B. had been born in the barn while the Johnson house in the Middle Fork valley was being built.

B. B. met and married Armina Josephine Lichlyter of Johnson. The young couple lived on the farm in the Middle Fork Valley until a startling development occurred, changing the route the family would take the rest of their lives.

This is the way B. F.'s side of the family heard the story.

J. Q. and Rietta were very much in awe of the handsome house B. F. and Lydia were building in the Middle Fork valley and wanted one similar to it built near the mill. J. Q. borrowed money from B. F. for the construction and proceeded to build a much fancier showplace than B. F. and Lydia had chosen to build.

While J. Q. and Rietta's house was under construction an accident occurred touching off angry words forever breaking the bonds of brotherhood between J. Q. and B. F.

James, the boy's father was by this time a widower and lived with B. F. and Lydia. A member of the family became ill who lived a long distance away, B. F. and Lydia felt a need to go to her bedside. James could not stay alone as he had become very feeble so they took him to J. Q. and Rietta's house to be cared for in their absence.

B. F. warned J. Q. to not put 'Papa' in an upstairs room as the stair railings were not in place and the elderly man could fall and hurt himself.

However, not heeding the warning, James was put to bed upstairs and in the night he fell, suffering injuries which he died from a few days later.

B. F. and Lydia were sent a wire to return home immediately which they did.

When James died, B. F. and J. Q. got into a heated argument blaming their father's death on each other. The rage and fury was so strong that at the first opportunity, B. F. repossessed the Mill and Johnson House from his brother and gave the entire property to his own son, B. B. Johnson.

But these things take time. Actually repossession did not take place until 1898. By this time B. B. and 'Josie' had three children, Frank, Dayne and Ruby.

In 1906 photographs were taken at the Johnson House near the Johnson Mill of the family. B. F. and Lydia occupied the house at that time along with B. B., Josie and the three little ones.

B. F. and J. Q.'s sister, Lucinda Hope tried to reconcile the brothers by inviting their wives to a meal at her home as Lucinda lay on her death bed.

From notes found in Frank Johnson's papers in 1982:

"On Wednesday, the 16th day of January, at 6:00 a.m., 1889, Mrs. Lucinda, wife of R. T. Hope, near the town of West Fork, departed this life. Mrs. Hope had been seriously ill for several weeks, and expressed an earnest desire to have a longer lease on life, that she might be permitted to enjoy the society of her relatives and friends here. She said had it been God's will she would like to have lived twenty years longer, but that she was not afraid to die. She further stated that she had toiled hard all her life and had just got out of debt and in circumstances that she could have enjoyed life more pleasantly. At noon on the 15th, the day before her death, she rallied and rested somewhat easier for a time,

and during this interval she requested that Mrs. Calvin Stockburger, Mrs. J. Q. Johnson and Mrs. B. F. Johnson would take dinner with her for the last time in this life and agreeable to her request the parties being present the dinner was prepared and spread before them. The victim of death then taking charge in person herself, passing the various refreshments, serving with her own hands each one of those, her most trusted and warmest friends in this world of trouble and affliction saying, 'I want you to eat with me for the last time' and remarked that she would never live to see another day, and finished her remarks by urgently

requesting them all to meet her in heaven, and true to her prophecy, at 6:00 a.m. the following morning she passed away."

By bringing together the wives of her two feuding brothers, Lucinda had hoped to somehow bring about a reconciliation. Her efforts failed.

Marion Frank, Burtis Dayne, and Ruby enjoyed living at the Johnson House. Many stories are told of social events hosted by the family and of the wonderful holiday gatherings.

Ruby married but did not have any children.

Frank married Edith Hinshaw, they had no children, either.

Dayne married Mamie Wilson of Baldwin community, they had seven children, so Josie and B. B. fell into grandparenthood with zest and zeal.

B. B. was a short fellow, about 5' 3" and weighed no more than 130 lbs. if that much. He was blessed with a clever mind and enjoyed building houses and other things. Creative genius was not in his best interests. Once he constructed a photographic lab for developing pictures and blew the lab up with himself inside. Pictures of a blackened 'little Grandpa' still are found in family albums. He also blackened garments hanging on the back porch which can be seen behind him.

B. B. smoked a pipe outside the house. He never smoked inside. Passing the house even on a day when snow as on the ground, he could be seen sitting or standing on the front porch, pipe in hand.

Another family tale of 'little Grandpa' was that he frowned upon the idea of indoor sanitary plumbing.

"It is unnatural for man to answer the call of nature anywhere other than outdoors." He supposedly said. His sentiments were so strong that later in life when his health failed him and Frank was concerned for him to use the outhouse, Frank had to tear the outhouse down in an effort to stop B. B. from going outside on cold winter days.

The family suspected later that B. B. found a clump of brush behind the smokehouse when nature called but he was never caught.

Edith and Frank made a very good team working together, in marriage, business and church. For a number of years, Frank was the Treasurer of the Johnson Baptist Church and Edith was the Secretary. The Johnson family helped charter the Johnson Baptist Church.

Dayne's children grew up in the Johnson House and Mill. Edith delighted in making shirts for the boys and dresses for the girls.

A bowl of mint candies sat on the buffet at the Johnson House and the children knew it was there, tempting them after a meal. One of the boys, Marion Leroy, pulled out the drawers one by one to climb up and get a mint. A crash brought Edith and Frank running when the buffet turned over on a very astonished little boy. He wasn't hurt, so they gave him a mint and told him next time to just ask.

B. B. passed the Johnson Mill on to Frank who operated it until 1978 when a broken hip forced him to retire.

Stringent government rules about the grinding of feeds were about to force costly adjustments to be made at the Mill, so Frank chose to close it rather than to comply with the new regulations.

Edith passed away and Frank remarried hoping to fill the empty void in his life. But less than two years later, Frank died also.

For the first time since 1865, the Johnson Mill was out of the Johnson family. An era had passed with only memories and "what ifs" remaining.

The smell of cornmeal along with the sound of Uncle Frank shaking down a sack of meal before tying a string around the top was gone. His last grinding had been of worm feed for earthworm

growers in the area. Hand grinding the special feed was time consuming but Frank enjoyed the novelty of it and gladly showed the process to any and all who were interested.

Today a very comfortable, INN AT THE MILL, is open for business where once a mill ran, preserving the structure in some ways while keeping the past alive for visitors.

Walnut beams set in place in 1865 still stand, open for viewing and touching. A reminder of another time when milling was a much needed profession and a millwright was a man to be admired.

Another time.....a new beginning.

References:

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"Boatright Family In Madison County"

Flashback, November, 1980; "The Benjamin F. Johnson

Residence, Middle Fork Valley" by C. Allen Brown

Flashback, February & May 1975 "Early Mills of Washington County" by Bobbie Byars Lynch

Northwest Arkansas Times, January 20, 1986, story of Johnson Mill

Goodspeed's History of Northwest Arkansas, 1889

### **Chronology:**

1799....James Johnson born January 4th  
1803....Mary Queener born September 29th  
1828....J. Q. Johnson born in Campbell Co., TN  
1835....B. F. Johnson born in Campbell Co., TN  
1839....Nancy Kiesta Boatright born Feb. 27th  
1850....James, Mary and children moved to Arkansas  
1852....J. Q. & Rietta Johnson were married  
1863....Nancy Kiesta Boatright Johnson died  
1864....B. F. Johnson married Lydia Lewis  
1865....Deed on file; Truesdale-Sutton Mill purchased  
by J. Q. Johnson and the Mayes family  
1876....Mary Queener Johnson died  
1880....Mayes family sold their interest in the  
Mill to the Johnson's  
1884....James Johnson died following an accident  
1889....Lucinda Johnson Hope died  
1901....Marion Frank Johnson was born  
1903....Burtos (Burtice) Dayne Johnson was born  
1949....the Johnson Mill was given to Marion Frank Johnson  
1978....the Johnson Mill ceased operating as a feed mill



Frank, Ruby and Dayne Johnson;  
children of B. B. & Josie Johnson





**Mamie (Wilson) and Dayne Johnson,  
parents of Ina Mae, Doris, Charles,  
David Lee, Leroy, Barbara & Doris;  
B. B. & Josie's grandchildren.**



Marion Frank Johnson, son of  
B. B. & 'Josie' Johnson





Benjamin Franklin (B. F.) and Lydia  
(Lewis) Johnson, photographed in 1906.