

Voices from the Past
Johnson's Settlement

By James Albert Johnson
And
Ethel Sarah Porter Johnson

June 9, 1968

Tape #10

Oral interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Theophilus E. Tandoh September 2004

Brigham Young University-Idaho

HF: Through the facilities of the Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society, the interview that follows, first placed on a reel-reel tape is now copied onto a C-60 cassette this 18th day of April, 1984...Of the Upper Snake River Valley, it is my privilege and opportunity this Sunday afternoon, it being the 9th day of June, 1968 to be here in the apartment of Brother and Sister James Albert Johnson who have the residence now of this lovely institution known as the Golden Living Center, a center where retired people can come and mingle together and live in joy and happiness with all the comforts and conveniences possible. And they have invited me here this afternoon that we might make a tape and interview Brother and Sister Johnson as to their early coming to the Upper Snake River country in the latter part of the 19th century. Now I usually, I ask a few leading questions Brother Johnson and on this basis we will commence our interview and I shall first ask you your full name.

JJ: James Albert Johnson.

HF: And you were born...?

JJ: In Logan, Utah.

HF: On what date?

JJ: December the 2nd, 1878.

HF: So you know that we have a gentleman here who is living in his ninetieth year, he will be ninety years old on this second day of December next. Now Sister Johnson you kindly state your full name.

SJ: Ethel Sarah Porter Johnson. And I was born at Centerville, Utah, Davis County, and my father sold his home there in the year 1898 and the morning of 1900 we landed here at Rexburg.

HF: Now Brother Johnson, you and your family left Logan and came to the Upper Snake River Valley in what year?

JJ: In about 1888.

HF: About '85.

SJ: See, he was born in '78 and he was 8 years old when they came.

HF: About '84 then.

SJ: Come up in '84.

HF: In '84.

HF: Where did your family meet and first settle, Brother Johnson?

JJ: I don't know whether I might give you that right straight or not. My mother's family is from Denmark and they settled in Hyrum and [inaudible] I couldn't tell you now, somewhere in Logan [inaudible].

HF: I see, now do you recall what year your mother and father brought their family from Logan, Utah and moved to Idaho?

JJ: [inaudible].

HF: In a lumber wagon.

JJ: Yeah.

HF: And you came up here in the fall of the year in 1884. About what month?

SJ: In the summer time of '84.

HF: In the summer time of '84?

JJ: In the summer time, I don't remember what month.

HF: And you were eight years of age?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: Did you have older brothers and sisters?

JJ: I had an older brother, but he didn't come with us. Then the next was Willie.

HF: Do you recall what conditions were like when you got here?

JJ: [inaudible].

HF: How did you get cross the Snake River?

JJ: With the ferry.

HF: On your final arrival here in Rexburg, did you stay with some people until such time where you could get off the cabin?

JJ: No, we rented a house.... (inaudible).

HF: Did you work for a store in Rexburg?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: Which store did you work?

JJ: [inaudible].

HF: Who owned the store?

JJ: [inaudible].

HF: The store is located in Rexburg?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: Mr. Flamm.

JJ: In northwest I think so.

HF: The block west is Flamm store, it is Mr. Flamm that operated the store in Rexburg in the early days and this was a family of different store?

JJ: Yeah in short yes [inaudible].

HF: Do you recall having known Thomas Elix?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: What impression do you remember of this good man, do you recall something that gives you reflection and impressed you about him?

JJ: Well [Inaudible].

HF: Do you remember his counselors who they were?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Do you remember Mr. Thomas?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Do you remember Mr. Jacob Henry Flamm?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Who were some of your neighbors in the place and area where you settled?

SJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Mr. Jacob operated the farm?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Mr. Scott?

JJ: [Inaudible].

SJ: 10 mile south of Salt Lake.

HF: I see, and this is where you father homesteaded?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: I see. Had there been some water brought to the land by this time?

JJ: No, not the land?

HF: Do you recall when water was brought down in the canal?

JJ: Uh-huh yes, [inaudible].

HF: Do you recall of working on this canal?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: What was the name of it?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: I see, and where was the water taken from?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: And what crop were they growing as you recall on the farm?

JJ: Wheat, [Inaudible].

HF: Any barley or oat?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Do you recall when they first produced potatoes; did you ever raise potatoes on this place?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: And did you produce sugar beat?

JJ: Yeah, [Inaudible].

SJ: Oh no.

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: The fact that you were contracted in Sugar City and about 1904 I think, and then I see that quite a number of the farmers commenced to raise further?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: Prior to that it was pretty much grain I guess?

JJ: Yeah [Inaudible].

HF: Now at the time that you were there had there been a well-organized place in Virgin?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: What is it called Virgin at that time, did the community called Virgin when you first arrived?

JJ: Yes, I heard them call virgin.

HF: Who is the Bishop at that time, Brother Johnson?

JJ: John E [Inaudible].

HF: And he made your father a bishop?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: What was his name?

JJ: George E.

HF: Your father's?

JJ: Oh my father's, J. J. Johnson.

HF: J. J. Johnson.

SJ: John James.

HF: John James, I see. Now I understand he filled a Bishop for a number of years. Did you succeed him as the next Bishop in Virgin?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: I see. Now you were Bishop from what year to what year. Do you recall what year you served as Bishop in the 13th Ward?

JJ: No.

SJ: He was released in '37 wasn't it?

JJ: No.

SJ: He was bishop for 13 years after he was released.

HF: Did you farm all during these years Brother Johnson?

JJ: Yeah.

HF: You farmed all during these years? This might have been your soul means of livelihood then the farming.

JJ: Yeah.

HF: Did you ever have contact with Ricks College?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: And how many years did you attend the college, the school and academy?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: When you went up to the college was there a lot of buildings?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Now after you served as a Bishop you went on mission I understand?

SJ: [Inaudible].

HF: How many yeas did you serve in Denmark?

JJ: [Inaudible].

IT: [Inaudible].

SJ: [Inaudible].

IT: Now brother Johnson, do you recall a little about when you first met your wife Sister Johnson, Sister Johnson this is a personal question isn't it? If you don't tell the story right and exactly and hopefully I can stand beside you. Do you recall some of the phenomenal circumstances of your lovely wife?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: [Inaudible].

SJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Would you tell Sister Johnson in what year you hit this ship?

JJ: [Inaudible].

HF: Side two the interview with James Albert Johnson and his wife Ethel Johnson. I regret the poor quality of the tape but it isn't listenable but at least contains a lot of good data.

SJ: There is nothing in the park as it is today, we have the old stage coach they travel in and we will dress like did the little old pioneers. I guess we were the laughing stock of all these old fancy eastern people who came up here. That didn't keep us from having a good time anyway we were in our high top shoes and we will stand on and really had a good time.

HF: And from that experience going through and developing this courtship between you and Brother Johnson and when was it? In the fall of the year?

SJ: We were married in July 1903.

HF: And where did this marriage take place?

SJ: It is the Logan Temple, Utah, Logan.

HF: And now you are about then to note and commemorate your 65th wedding anniversary this...

SJ: On the 1st day of July.

HF: On the 1st day of July you will note your 65th wedding anniversary?

SJ: That's right.

HF: And that is amazing.

SJ: And we have five lovely daughters; we didn't have any boys in our family. But we have five lovely daughters and they are all living.

HF: Did they live in this area?

SJ: I have three daughters in California and one in Twin Falls Idaho and one here in Rexburg which is Kingwoods of Rexburg. But one of the girls in California will be here next time to celebrate the day with us. We are having it just a little early because the daughter that lives in Twin Falls is leaving for Europe on the 24th of this month and so we're just having our anniversary a couple of weeks earlier so that most of the girls can be with us.

HF: That is lovely. Now Brother Johnson as we close this tape is there something you would like to say to your posterity, to your five daughters, I just assume that you have a number of grandchildren.

SJ: We do have thirteen grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

HF: And now would you like to leave them some message of hope and cheer and counsel as we close the tape.

JJ: Well, I would like to say that, I miss Ellen, always set a good example for your children ... therefore try [Inaudible].

SJ: Can I just say just a word?

HF: You bet.

SJ: I want to leave this to all our grand children and our great grandchildren. If you just follow the footsteps of your grand father, you will never have any big object in your way, because your grand father who has been a faithful Latter-day Saint and very true husband, too, and grandfather to all of you. So in the future I just want to leave this message to you that if you follow his footsteps you will never go astray in anything. This is from your grandmother.

HF: Now it's been a real genuine experience this afternoon to meet with you good people. We haven't been able to possibly a lot of strong words from Brother Johnson. I feel through the spirit that these two people who have lived together 65 years, almost, as a married couple are choice Latter-day Saints. I am sure this is true, having well defined family and having served the community and the church and having served 31 months in the mission field. All of these point to a life of genuine service and I am sure he is highly

regarded in his community. So it's been a real joy for me to be here and take some of these few moments of Sunday afternoon of the 9th of June.

SJ: Can I just say one of more word?

HF: You bet.

SJ: This is Reid Moore Ward, I want to leave. Now Brother Johnson and I have been married for 65 years and in all of those years we've been convenient with each other and tried to be pleasant with each other and most of all we cherish very very highly, years that we've never had a death in our family. That it is very rare for a couple to be married for 65 years and we have never tasted death either the grand children, great grand children and all. And so we do appreciate the Lord being with us and helping us along that line.