

## **Obit: William Frederick "Fred" Johnson**

compiled by Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2019

*Thanks to Larry Johnson who has provided such wonderful information on the Johnson family at the Find A Grave website!*

Death calls a Basin pioneer - WF Johnson expires at home last Friday - Early settler in Big Horn Basin - Built Foundation for the first house in Basin and many early buildings here -

W. F. Johnson, who had been quite ill for some time with an affliction of the heart, expired at his home here last Friday evening at 8:15. Funeral services were held Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock from the Methodist church, Rev. Ivan Beck of the Baptist church officiating. The members of Basin Camp No. 5586, Modern Woodmen of America, attended the funeral in a body.

Appropriate music was sung by the Woodmen quartet consisting of Messrs. Ahrens, Talbott, R. A. Gould, and A. X. Johnson, with Mrs. A. Hansel at the piano. Interment was made in Mount View cemetery, the pall bearers being F. M. Hime, K. Ahrens, Ernest Borden, R. A. Gould, W. E. Talbott, and A. X. Johnson. Services at the grave were in charge of the Woodmen, Lou Blakesley acting as Venerable Counsel.

William Frederick Johnson was born at Momence, Ill., on March 10, 1856. He made his home with his parents on a farm during the earlier years of his life, but later took up the business of blacksmithing, at which business he continued over the greater part of his life. Upon reaching manhood he was married to Miss Etta Reeves. To this union were born five children, Walter, David, Mrs. Mary Snyder, Owen, and Harry. The latter died at birth and the mother gave up her life on the following day.

Later at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1889, Mr. Johnson was married to Miss Lucilla S. Patten and she, with the three sons and one daughter now survive him. The family made its home for a number of years at Ashland, Neb., and afterward moved to a farm near Inman, Holt county, Neb. where they resided for some time. In 1895 they came to the Big Horn Basin, and settled near Lovell. The Globe Canal Company had advertised the great opportunities that were offered at that place and they got a lot of families to come out from Nebraska. When they got here they found there was no water on the land and the families had to scatter around the creek bottoms, where a few settlers had located. Most of the people had a very little money so they simply had to stay.

They went through some real hardships. The time came when they had no money. It was a great treat even to see a dollar. They had simply traded around, beans for potatoes, potatoes for wheat, etc. The Johnson family planted some wheat and when it was ready for the harvest they had no binder to harvest it and no threshing machine to thresh it, so they cut heads off, put them in a sack, hammered it out and cleaned it. There was weed that grew along with the wheat that made it bitter, so they had to wash the wheat and then grind it in a coffee mill, which they had to do for six months or more. At that time Mr. Johnson was running a blacksmith shop in

Lovell, but since no one had any money, he had to take beans, potatoes, wheat, etc. in payment for his work.

In the year 1896 the family moved to Basin and Mr. Johnson took up the land upon which he lived for so many years, adjoining the town of Basin on the northeast. At that time the nearest ranch to the south was the Barney Rogers place, between here and Manderson. To the north the first place was the Borner ranch on the Greybull River. Over in the Basin Gardens were the Tillard ranch, the John Larson ranch, and the Peny ranch, at the extreme north end of the flat.

Mr. Johnson was one of the organizers of the original company formed to build the Big Horn Canal. Along with others, he did a lot of work and then the company failed. He got nothing for his labor. He was also one of those who united to build the Tillard canal. He installed the first waterworks plant at Basin. He laid the first foundation in Basin, that upon which the W. S. Collins home was located. He was with those who joined together to give Basin its first creamery. He built the stone school house and the old electric light and power building. He also built the stone school house on Shell Creek. Among other buildings he constructed were the G. W. Black building, now occupied by the Basin Hardware store, and the building adjoining it on the north, which he built for Mr. Jas. I. Patten.

He was one of those who united to organize the first Methodist church in Basin, was a member of the board of trustees, and he assisted with the work of building the church and parsonage. The first service of the church was held in the Johnson home.

He was one of the charter members of the local lodge of Modern Woodmen of America. He was much interested in introducing fruit into the Big Horn Basin and rendered a splendid service in proving many valuable fruits able to withstand the rigors of the Big Horn Basin climate. He never failed any man who needed his services. He extended credit to many who never intended to pay and to others who could not pay, with the result that his books are filled with accounts that never will be paid, but which, if collection had been possible, would have given him every luxury during the declining years of his life.

He was a mechanic of unusual ability and during his life patented many labor saving devices, but because he could not get the backing necessary to place them on the market, none of them ever made him any money. He was an untiring worker. Despite the years that he carried he kept up his labor until but a few months ago. Last year he spent the greater part of each forenoon in his garden, taking care of strawberries, raspberries, cucumbers, etc. His home on north 5th Street is almost a jungle of fruit trees, berry bushes, flowering shrubs, etc., which he grew in luxuriant perfection.

He was a good citizen. He was never lacking in courage to stand for what he thought was best for the welfare of the community. He was a good neighbor. He never failed a neighbor in distress and in time of need his supplies were his neighbors if he would accept them. He was a faithful church member. At the time of his death, as he had been for years, he was a member of

the board of trustees of the Methodist church., and he was faithful in his attendance and in his pledges to the church.

He goes to his reward with the knowledge that he gave to the world a family that have proved themselves to be useful citizens, successful in their various lines of endeavor and appreciated by the men and women who have associated with them. Measured by his ability to acquire wealth, his life was not a success, but in every other way, and in those things that count with men and women who appreciate real worth, his life was a most successful one. The world in which he moved is better for his having lived in it, and there is genuine sadness in our community because of the death of a worthy citizen.

In addition to the members of the family mentioned above, Mr. Johnson is survived by two brothers(?), one living in Hood River, Ore., (George Silas Johnson) and the other in Kansas City (Grinella "Ella" Augusta Johnson McCleery).

[source] The Basin Republican (Basin Wyoming); 25 March 1926.

Do you want to know more?

Link to William Frederick Johnson in the database

<http://www.pamgarrett.com/getperson.php?personID=I4444&tree=clrksn>

**Obit of William Frederick Johnson compiled by Pamela Hutchison Garrett for the Family Stories website; 2019.**