



H I S T O R Y

of the

JOHNSON FAMILY

by

James Johnson

For His Children

Baltimore, Aug' 1842.

For
My dear Children:

As the history of my family may be amusing and interesting to you, I will devote some of my leisure hours to it.

Of the family of your sainted mother, you know everything.

My great grandfather was a lawyer of Liverpool and emigrated to Maryland at an early period, after the settlement of the Colony. Where and at what age he died, I have no information.

My grandfather owned a beautiful farm at the mouth of St. Leonard's creek in Calvert County, rendered famous by the battle of the barges, under the command of Commodore Barney, with the British frigates, during the last war with England.

I once visited at the house which stood on an eminence which commanded a view of the Patuxent as far as Point Patience---was burnt down and only one small house remained---close to the Creek---which my father built, and carried on a bakery to supply the vessels which lay in the creek with ship bread..

Thomas Johnson. (grandfather) married Dorcas Sedgwick early in life and raised his numerous family on the farm until they were able to take care of themselves.

I have a very fair recollection of his person which I think was tall and robust. I well remember his death, which took place on the 11th day of April, 1777, the day my brother Thomas was born, at Bush Creek Forge. The house is now standing on the hill, just above the B. & O. R. R. The coffin was placed on a pair of wheels and carried to Calvert County and he was buried alongside of his wife, who had died some years before, on the eminence which overlooks the river and creek, on his own farm. Bill Griffith a Welch servant drove the carriage .

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He was a man of very strong mind which descended to his children(which you shall hear in the sequel)---great purity of character and incorruptible integrity. He was married only once and lived to see all his children grow up,settled in the world,and his son Thomas,Governor of Maryland.

His sons were Benjamin,Thomas,James,Joshua,John,Baker and Roger; the daughters,Mary,Rebecca,Dorcas and Elizabeth.

Benjamin was twice married and had by the first wife, Thomas,the father of Mrs.Breat and Mary;and by the second, Benjamin,Robert,Nancy,James,John and Baker,who all grew up to man's estate,and all are dead except Nancy,and Baker who is six months older than I am;and they resided at Union Town and Pittsburg. He was a good,easy man,a poor manager,with but little mind. Upon the death of his last wife,the children were divided among the brothers. My father brought up Ben and nancy;Uncle Reger,Robert and James;and Uncle Baker,the other two.

Mary married Walter Hellen,by whom she had two sons and a daughter. John Hellen died of the camp fever during the Revolutionary war;Mary married a Mr.Bell and Walter who went to London as clerk at his Uncle's countinghouse,marrried his cousin Nancy an adopted daughter of Joshua. He left two sons who are now living.

Thomas married Miss Nancy Jennings of Annapolis,the daughter of Thomas Jennings,Register of the Land Office,under the Proprietary Government. He was brought up in the provincial Court office and read law under Mr.Bordley,and became one of the most eminent in the State,ranking with Stone, Chase,Jennings and Paca. His person was slender and delicate. He lived to the age of 88. His mind was of the highest order of intellect. Though not a classical scholar,he was a good writer and could read and understand the French language without pronouncing it. He was very irascible in his disposition,but it soon subsided; the most indulgent parent and master and the most pure and disinterested patriot

I ever knew. His public services were long and many---his career was glorious without the smallest imputation against his integrity and he enjoyed all the honors of his native State and many of the highest of the United States, some of which he refused though solicited by General Washington his bosom friend. The last production of his pen was his oration on the death of Washington, which I now have.

Mrs. Johnson was a beauty of the day. By her he had Thomas, Jennings, Nancy, Mrs. Graham, James, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Joshua and Dorcas.

Thomas, the father of Mrs. Evans, Mrs. McPherson and Eliza, was married to Miss Charlette Hesseleus of Primrose near Annapolis, who survived the birth of Mary by a few days.

His second wife was Eliza Russell, a beauty, and resembling your mother in face and person, more than any one I ever saw.

She died early in life. He was a man of very little mind---dissolute in his habits and fell a victim to intemperance. Nancy married Mr. John Grahame whom you all knew.

Eliza was as lovely a girl as ever graced a drawing room, with a mind something like her father. She died unmarried, in the winter of 1779, beloved and regretted by all who knew her.

The history of your aunts Becky and Dorcas, and Uncle Joshua you all know.

Dorcas married, late in life, Col. Josias Clapham of Loudon County, Virginia. She never had any children. After Col. Clapham's death she resided with my father at Springfields, until his death, when she removed to Bloomsberry Forge, and shortly after died and was buried there.

She was a woman of uncommon strength of mind---great industry and piety and very economical in all her habits.

Rebecca married a Mr. McKensie, the grandfather of the present Dr. McKensie. She died soon after and left no children.

James, my father, was a well set man--robust constitution-- a strong mind and the firmest resolution. By industry and good management, he acquired the property I unfortunately lost during the pressure and troubles of the times. He was married at the age of thirty-five to Peggy Skinner against the will of some of his family, but with the approbation of his brother Thomas, (who was the mentor of all the family,) and never lived a happier and more contented couple.

If ever an angel was personified on earth, it was my mother.

Ann resembles her in person more than any of you.

I was born on the 28th of May, 1774, at Fort Frederick Furnace in Washington County, from whence my father removed to Catoc~~ton~~ Furnace in the November following, where he resided on the spot that the Auburn house now stands, until 1793, when he removed to Springfields.

My brother Thomas was born at Bush Creek Forge, April 11th, 1777. He was a fine person--amiable disposition, but inattentive to the improvement of his mind which was strong.

He died in February, 1818, greatly beloved and long lamented by his family and friends.

My sister Rebecca was born 7th of January, 1779. She was a fine person, lovely blue eyes, red hair and very like my Mary, but not so stout. She had a fine mind, great strength of character and was as pure as Angel's breath on earth; the most affectionate daughter, sister and friend. She died in September, 1897, in her 18th year.

Elizabeth married Captain Cook, a blustery sea captain, as bold as Caesar and as honest as day. He had a great many oddities; wore a cocked hat, short queue; was very industrious and made a good husband. Aunt Becky was a mild, easy, affectionate woman of little mind, but that was atoned for by her great amiability. They had one daughter, Nancy, who married Dr. Brashear and raised a large family, the most of them now dead.

The sons were George, who was lost at sea on a voyage to

London, to go into his Uncle Joshua's counting house;

Thomas, the philosopher, as weak as he was opinionated;

James, my earliest and dearest friend, who read and practiced law and would have been the first legal character in the State, if his life had been spared. He died in 1798, universally beloved, esteemed and regretted;

John and Roger who both died young, and John now living at Rockville, Montgomery County, Maryland, practicing law.

Joshua went to London very early in life before the Revolution, where he was brought up in a counting house and became a large dealer in tobacco, under the firm of Wallace, Johnson and Muir. He married, I don't know whom, but she was very beautiful, ambitious and extravagant and made him and his family poor. He was a weak, vain man, fond of great people.

His house was the resort of the ministers, other diplomatic characters and the Americans generally.

He left London in the fall of 1897, and arrived at George Town in November, where he settled with his family.

His children were Nancy who married Walter Hellen, her cousin; Louisa who married John Quincy Adams, Caroline who married Andrew Buchannan, and afterwards Mr. Fry, chief Clerk of the Paymaster's department; Harriet who married a Mr. Boyd, a very worthless fellow, whom John Quincy made an Indian agent in Michigan, which place he now holds; Kitty who married Wm. Smith, no great things; Eliza who married Governor Pope of Kentucky and left two daughters; and Adelaide was Walter Hellen's second wife, and no great things;

The only son Thomas, now living, who was postmaster at New Orleans for many years and who had more of the feminine character of any person I ever knew; I am told he lives like a hermit caring for nobody and nobody caring for him.

Uncle Joshua was appointed American Consul at London by General Washington, which he held until he left the kingdom.

John, the doctor, was one of those characters whose nature sometimes in her freaks gives to the world.

He was extremely indolent, self-opinionated and knew as little of mankind as he did of his profession; suspicious to the extreme, liable to be imposed on by every artful intruder into his society and jealous of those who never intended to injure him. He was never married and spent most of the time in the houses of his brothers, where, with all his oddities, he was always a welcome guest. James Cook and myself shared the most of his confidence and we spent many hours in amusing ourselves with his eccentricities and often flattering his vanity. He had a tender heart and it required little address to disarm him of his resentments? He was never married, but was the father of Mrs. Clapham by his housekeeper, Mrs. Sharp, a person very undesirable to a man of taste. You all knew Mrs. Clapham who was as distinguished for her good sense, amiable disposition, friendly feelings, unbounded hospitality and piety, as she was by the obscurity of her birth.

Baker, the Colonel, secured with his brother Roger a slight classical education and was brought up to the law in the office of his brother, the Governor. He commenced the practice of law in Montgomery, Frederick and Washington Counties simultaneously with Richard Potts, his fellow student, and they for many years engrossed the whole practice of the three counties.

He was inferior to Potts in talents, as much as he was superior to him in popular manners, and a small share of little art which bore him triumphantly through their long years of practice. He was a most hospitable and kind friend, the fondest of fathers, husbands and relations and his house was proverbial for unbounded hospitality. He married Miss Catherine Worthington, the daughter of Mr. Nicholas Worthington of Summer Hill near Annapolis, a most estimable family, by whom he had a large family. Kitty, Mrs. Ross Baker, some who died in infancy, William Worthington and Charles, Julianna, Matilda and Caroline, all known to you.

Major Roger Johnson, the youngest son, received the ~~same~~ education that his brother Baker did. He was a much better scholar and his mind was on a par with the Governor's and your grandfather's. He was very domestic, retired and industrious; was brought up by my father and always looked upon him in the light of a father more than a brother. He was very industrious, economical and temperate in everything. He married Miss Elizabeth Thomas, a Quakeress and most estimable lady, the daughter of Richard Thomas a highly respected planter and farmer of Montgomery County, by whom he had eleven children; Richard, George, Henrietta, Samuel, Sally, William, Joseph, Dorcas, Charles, James and Eliza. The only survivors are now George, Henrietta, Charles, James and Eliza.

I have been thus particular in the account of our family, in order that you may not be ignorant of their history and that when you meet with any of your relations that you will treat them with the same hospitality, kindness and affection that have always been practiced in the families heretofore.

My mother was a descendant of one of the oldest families in Calvert county. About forty years ago, I saw a headstone in Mr. Richard Grahame's yard in Lower Marlborough which was placed on the grave of ^a Mrs. Skinner, and at that time was at least one hundred years old. Mary tells me that when she saw it, the inscription was not legible. My mother was the second daughter. Her sisters were Priscilla, the oldest, and Sally the youngest. Priscilla married her cousin Thomas Skinner, who died early in life leaving her a widow with three children, Adderton, Priscilla and Petsy. She was a fine good woman with genuine, old-fashioned manners and hospitality.

Adderton is about my age--was married to Miss Magruder in early life by whom he had a large family of daughters and moved ~~to~~ ^{from} Prince George to the State of Mississippi, where he has accumulated a handsome estate and settled.

His daughter Priscilla married Mr. Maddox of Prince George's County and resides near Washington. She is the mother of Mr. Maddox in the Post Office, and has several children grown up and settled. An excellent plain old lady and worthy her good fortune in life. Sallie married William Frazier a poor miserable creature, who died long ago leaving her a widow with a large family, nine of whom I knew after they grew up. Her brothers were Richard, Clement and Maryland. I never saw the two former and know nothing of their families.

Their descendants, if any, I believe live in Calvert County and I suppose are very poor. Uncle Maryland was brought up a sailor and was employed on board a British man-of-war where he served seven years and was in the engagement between the British fleet under Admiral Rodney and Count DeGrasse, who was defeated with great loss. He was as brave a man as ever walked the deck and deserved a better fate. After the war was ended he obtained his discharge and entered into the Merchants service and commanded the ship Nantz belonging to Wallace, Johnson and Muir. He was treated very badly by the concern and had to suffer imprisonment for some time in London on their account. He was a very stout and athletic man---a hardy sailor---was much pitted with the small-pox which he took in the natural way during his captivity in the fleet. He married an English lady by whom he had one son, Richard; a fine robust boy, when I last saw him. He grew up to manhood, turned out a clever man, went to Mississippi where he was married. I knew nothing more of him. His father died in Calvert County nearly forty years ago.

John S. Skinner, the late postmaster here, is the son of Frederick Skinner, brother to Uncle Trueman, as worthy a man as ever lived and cousin to your grandmother; and it is my request if ever you meet with any of her relations, however humble and poor, that you will treat them for her sake with the same kindness and affection as you would your relations on my side.

My last request of you is that you will always preserve the same brotherly love for one another for which the most of our family have been so justly remarked, for be assured if you do not love one another, you will not deserve the love of God or man.

I give you my blessing and pray that our Good and Heavenly Father will take and keep you in his care and protection throughout all your lives.

Yr. most affectionate

Father

Baltimore.

Jas. Johnson.

September, 1842.

P.S. Betsy Skinner married Stephen Johns and died early in life leaving an only daughter to her, who, I understand, is married to a Mr. Skinner and resides near Nottingham in Prince George's County. I hear that she is a most estimable lady and resembles her mother in her person and good qualities.