

Citizens – Charles Johnson Family

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



MONTAGUE MUSEUM

Children of Charles Johnson (1850-1912) and his wife Anna Charlotte Nelson (1854-1934)

Edward William Johnson (1882-1962)

Vena Johnson (1883-1970) Flora Elizabeth Johnson (1887-1974) Anna Belle Johnson (Paul) Travis (1891-1974)

This lovely family portrait of a brother and his three sisters is just one of the many photographs that have found a home in the Montague Museum. Fortunately, unlike so many others, this one identified the people. So, who were Ed, Flora, Vena and Anna. After a little bit of investigation, it was discovered that they were the children of Charles and Anna Charlotte (ne Nelson) Johnson.

Charles Johnson was born in Sweden 17 August 1850. He arrived in this country in 1872 and spend the first six years in Pennsylvania before coming to Montague. In the early days he was employed in the lumber mills, one of them being the Charles Cook mill which later became Ravenswood Resort. They lived at the site for a number of years. After that industry died out, he turned to farming. He was a public-spirited citizen and had served on the village council until his term expired in the Spring 1912.

On October 14, 1881, Charles married Anna Charlotte Nelson in Montague. Anna Nelson was also born in Sweden on 26 May 1854 and came to this country shortly before she married Charles. They had four children: Edward, Vena, Flora Elizabeth and Anna Belle.

Edward William Johnson was born in Montague on 6 Mar 1882. He lived his entire life in the area where he did odd jobs and at one time worked as a gardener for a private estate. According to the 1940 census, Edward and his sister Vena were caring for two boys, Menno Earl Gingrich, age 14, and his younger brother Clifford Eldon Gingrich, age 11. The census indicated that the boys had been with Johnson and his sister at least since 1935. Vena was listed as the next of kin when Menno enlisted in the draft in 1943. He was discharged in July 1944 and died in December of that year. His name appears on the plaque at the Memorial Athletic Field. Edward died at the Shelby hospital on 20 August 1962 after a brief illness.

Vena was born 11 December 1883 in Montague in the same house in which she lived all her life. She was a member of the Lebanon Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Christian Women's Society. She died at Lakeshore Community Hospital in Shelby on 19 August 1970.

Flora Elizabeth was born on 13 June 1887. She graduated from Montague High School in 1905. She was a Registered Nurse by profession and worked as a private duty nurse in the area for a while. She served in the Army Nurse Corp during World War I. She then lived and worked in hospitals in the Chicago area for a number of years before returning to the White Lake area and taking up residence in Whitehall. Flora was the last surviving sibling. She passed away at her home on E. Lewis Street in Whitehall on 1 November 1974.

Anna Belle was born in Montague on 17 January 1891. She graduated in the Class of 1907 from Montague HS. Anna was the only one of the Johnson siblings who married. On 18 June 1918, she married Paul L. Travis in Winnemucca, Humboldt, Nevada. They had three children, one of whom died at birth. They lived most of their married life in Nevada. It seems, however, that they returned to Montague around 1950 as they appeared in the census that year living with their son Paul, Jr. on Prospect Street near Edward and Vena. After Vena's death, Anna and her family moved to San Jose, California, where she died 14 July 1974. Her husband Paul died there in 1986. Both are buried in a San Jose cemetery.

Charles died at his home in Maple Grove on 18 May 1912. His wife Anna died there on 20 March 1934. They are both buried in Oakhurst Cemetery in Whitehall, along with three of their four children.