

MY FATHER'S STORY

My great, great grandfather and my great, great grandmother were the sultan and sultanness of Morocco, North Africa. My great grandfather was Major George Watson of Scotland and my great grandmother was Tabitha, a former princess of Morocco and a daughter of the sultan and sultanness named above. My grandfather was Moses Jackson, a resident of the Green Springs neighborhood of Louisa Co. Virginia and my grandmother was Miami Jackson, a daughter of Tabitha, the former princess of Morocco and also a resident of Green Springs, Louisa Co. Virginia. My father was Cornelius Johnson, a resident of Richmond, Virginia.

I am the great, great grandson of a sultan and sultanness of Morocco, North Africa, whose names we know not, nevertheless, I have been reliably informed that this sultan and sultanness lived and ruled in North Africa over a certain tribe of Moors sometime in the 17th century. There was added to the union of this sultan and sultanness, two sons and a daughter, the names of the sons are Pedro and Manuel, that of the daughter is Tabitha.

Now, there was a man in this Moorish tribe over which the sultan and sultanness ruled, named Robert. This man Robert, or Bob as he was usually called, in some manner became acquainted with Tabitha, the princess. They learned to love each other and being encouraged and assisted by Pedro and Manuel, her two brothers, Tabitha finally eloped with Bob and they were married. When the news of this marriage reached the ears of the sultan he was filled with indignation and wrath at the thought of his daughter the princess marrying a man of the common people - one of his subjects. Therefore, he gave orders that all concerned with this elopement and secret

marriage should be arrested and punished, each for the part he had played. Pedro and Manuel having learned of the sultan's intention decided to flee the country with Bob and Tabitha as they feared for their lives. They managed to cross the Mediterranean Sea aboard a vessel bound for Spain. After many wanderings they finally settled in Scotland where they entered the service of a certain Mr. George Watson and were living there with him at the time of the outbreak of the great civil war in England between the forces of Oliver Cromwell and those of King Charles the First. In this war Mr. George Watson joined the Scottish Army which supported the cause of Charles the First. He won his commission as a major in this service and fought valiantly through the war until the final great battle of Naseby where the forces of Charles were completely overcome by those of Cromwell. (Note - a long account of the various engagements during the war are here omitted - L.B.J.)

As we have seen from the foregoing, after the last great and awful battle between the forces of Cromwell with the English armies and General Leslie with the Scottish armies, during the great upheaval and confusion of the said battle, the fighting Major Watson of the Scottish armies, finding no other alternative to escape arrest and the possibility of being put to death by the English sword, decided to flee to the United States. He took with him Bob and Tabitha with their two children, also Pedro and Manuel, her two brothers. All these people the major took with him from Scotland to the United States on the promise of giving them better wages than they could get in Scotland.

Now we bid adieu to Africa, England and Scotland with all their wonderful revelations of eventful scenes, of incidents of bloody conflicts and travel to the United States. We have cited many and various incidents in

an effort to make plain how our ancestors came to leave their native homes and came to the new world - the United States of America.

When Major George Watson came to America he settled in that beautiful region known as the Green Springs neighborhood, Louisa Co. Virginia. This pretty spot of land is bounded on the south by Fluvanna Co. and the three chop road, a public highway running from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Richmond, Virginia, on the north by the Pamunkey River, on the east by Goochland Co. and on the west by the C. & O. Railroad. It was here in this beautiful country that Major Watson purchased a large tract of land which was known as the Ionia Farm. On this farm he settled with Bob and Tabitha, their two children, and the former princess' two brothers, Pedro and Manuel. He then proceeded to carry out his promise to give them better wages than they could receive in Scotland. He there agreed to pay each of the adults the sum of forty-five (45) dollars a year. This agreement the major kept faithfully for four years.

At the expiration of the fourth year, Major Watson informed Bob, Tabitha, Pedro and Manuel that he could no longer pay them the sum of forty-five (45) dollars a year as it was against the law of the colony to pay colored servants and his white neighbors were making a great complaint because he paid them wages. He told them, therefore, that he would give to each of them a house with land, a mule and farming implements, also rations for a year; that they in the future could cultivate this land and support themselves. This decided change in the state of affairs was displeasing to the Moroccans and they decided to return to Scotland, since they felt that the Major had broken faith with them. When Major Watson was informed of their intention to go again to Scotland, he told them that they were at liberty to go but that they would be obliged to leave behind the two children

which had been born to Bob and Tabitha since they came to Virginia, as it was contrary to law for such children to leave the country until they became of age. Bob and Tabitha were sadly disappointed at this startling information as they were anxious to return to Scotland with Pedro and Manuel. However, they could not bear to abandon their younger children, so decided to remain on the Ionia Farm, Pedro and Manuel, having no families and being dissatisfied with the Major's change of front, left immediately for Scotland and were never heard of again.

Bob took his disappointment very seriously and it is said that he died heartbroken shortly afterward. Tabitha, the former princess, was now left a widow with her four children in the old log cabin in the old mill field; this was one of the log cabins which the Major had built for them on the land which he had given to them for a home. It was here in this old log cabin, after the death of Bob, that Major George Watson took Tabitha, the former princess of Morocco to wife, after the manner and custom of the white man and the black woman in the Southland - this form of taking a wife was called the jump over the broom stick. Now with the death of Bob, her lawful husband, Pedro and Manuel her two brothers having returned to Scotland, Tabitha with her four children, one boy and three girls, is left in a strange land without friends, among strangers and entirely at the mercy and lustful whims of Major George Watson who brought her from Scotland.

At this time Major George Watson had become a prosperous farmer and a prominent citizen of the neighborhood and had begun to rear a family by a white woman who was his lawful wife but as we have said, he had also Tabitha the African princess to wife. The major began to rear a second family by Tabitha the African princess and in course of time a daughter was born of this union and was named Miami.

Prosperity continued to smile on Major Watson - he bought much land and many slaves; it is said that one time there were on his Ionia plantation three hundred sixty-five slaves, of this large number of slaves owned by the Watson family, there are, so far as we know, but four living today - two in Louisa Co. Virginia, and my sister and myself in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Years passed on until finally Major George Watson, after a ripe old age, died, leaving to mourn their loss a family of his white and lawful wife, and a family of his black wife, Tabitha, the former princess. The remains of Major George Watson, my great grandfather, was laid to rest in a well kept burying ground behind his old carriage house, on his beautiful Ionia lawn. Adieu Major George Watson. Peace to his ashes. Some years later. Tabitha, the former princess of Morocco, my great grandmother, now bent with age and care, gave up the ghost, died in the faith, and was buried in the old burying ground, surrounded by shrubbery and not far from the old well and bucket which supplied water to the old log cabins. Tabitha left to mourn their loss five children, numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren, many of whom I have known, other I have never met. But my great grandmother, the former princess, has gone to the great beyond; peace to her ashes and rest to her soul.

My grandfather, Moses Jackson, was owned as a slave by Major Watson, and married by grandmother Miami Watson, daughter of the princess. My grandmother Miami like my grandfather Moses was also owned by Major Watson as a slave - his daughter and his slave.

As the years passed on there was added to the union of my grandfather and grandmother Moses and Miami Jackson, eight children, two boys and six girls. Their names were Peter, Jacob, Lucy, Fannie, Rachel, Anna, Eliza and Melissa. These were all born in the old log cabin built by Major Watson

which he gave to Bob and Tabitha as a home in the old mill field on his Ionia farm. I knew all these except Uncle Jacob who died before I was born and Aunt Anna who was sold away to Alabama before I was old enough to remember. The remaining seven children were owned by Major Watson at his death, at which time the estate including the slaves fell to Dr. George Watson, Jr., son of the Major. Dr. Watson, in time, bought a home in Richmond, Virginia, where he had acquired an extensive practice in his profession. Melissa, the youngest of the Jackson children, when a young woman was taken to Richmond, Virginia, as a maid in Dr. Watson's family, which consisted of eleven persons.

It was here in Richmond, Virginia, that Melissa Jackson met Cornelius Henry Johnson, who wooed and finally took her to wife. A son was born of this union, whom Melissa named for her father and husband, calling him Moses after her father and Cornelius after her husband. Sometime after the birth of her son, Melissa Jackson Johnson was sent back to the country home to keep house for one of the Doctor's sons who was not married and lived at the country home. So Cornelius Henry Johnson and Melissa Jackson Johnson, man and wife, were forcibly separated, he in Richmond, Virginia, and she in the country more than sixty miles apart, as frequently happened under the slave system. I, the son, was also separated from my father for I was sent along with my mother. My parents, of course, were sadly grieved at this separation but I was too young to be sad or to grieve, in fact I did not know my father.

My father, Cornelius Henry Johnson, was owned as a slave by a Mr. Barrett of Richmond, Virginia. This Mr. Barrett conducted a tobacco factory in which my father served as an overseer. Father begged Mr. Barrett to sell him to Dr. Watson in order that he might be sent out to the Ionia Farm to be

with his wife and son, but Mr. Barrett refused, telling my father that he could not get along in the factory without him. Under these circumstances Father decided to run away. When he considered the time fully ripe and everything prepared, he took with him his oldest brother Fleming and bade farewell to his mother and three other brothers and left Richmond and started for Canada. They managed to reach Canada without serious mishap and settled in Montreal. After various vicissitudes the brothers eventually entered into the tobacco business in Montreal. After assuring himself that his business was prospering my father wrote to his former owner, Mr. Barrett, and told him where he was and what he was doing. My father, with his brother, Fleming, remained in Canada until after the Civil War in the United States, after which they returned to Richmond, Virginia, my father bringing with him his French Canadian wife, whom he married in Montreal.

In the meantime, my mother Melissa Jackson Johnson, despairing of ever having my father return, had also married again. My mother had two children, a boy and a girl. She was separated from her two children while they were very young. We, her two young children were left to the mercies of a cold world while our mother was sent to the farm of R. O. Morris to be what they called a Mammy for one of Dr. Watson's daughters. At the close of the Civil War in 1865 my mother came to the Watson's farm, took her two children and returned to Richmond, Virginia. The Morrises felt that they could not get along without my mother as a Mammy for their children and persuaded her to come back to them. She left us for a time with an aunt in Richmond until she had built a house with the aid of her last husband. when my sister and I went to the country to join them and we all lived in this house quite comfortably for a while.

VERIFIED. P. 88 FREDERICK'S BUREAU COHABITATION LISTS:

"BROWN, JOSEPH AGE 40. LIZZY AGE 47. LIZZY HAS A FORMER HUSBAND COHENUS JOHNSON, had 1 child by him, Moses."

Check in Frederick's records

I was born on Sharco Hill, No. 101, corner of Sixth and Franklin Streets, this being the city residence of Dr. Watson and where my father and mother were married in their younger days. When I went to the country the last time from Richmond, I served as butler in the home of Mr. R. O. Morris, while my sister attended school. I had now become a young man, and at the age of 21 years, four months and six days I took to wife Miss Martha Ellen Wilkinson. My bride was twenty-five years, five months and five days old when we married. We were married August 6, 1870. *Moses lost a 16 year old son*

On the afternoon of July 22, 1874, the sad news was brought to me that my mother was dead. Yes, my poor, devoted mother was dead. She had just been killed in an accident caused by a runaway ox team while coming from the R. O. Morris home to her own home. The oxen had taken fright and ran off into the woods where she was thrown out of the cart and crushed between the cart and a tree. My mother was born in the old log cabin in the old mill field on the Watson's Ionia farm in 1813 and died (August) July 22, 1874, at the age of sixty-one years and eight months. At the time of her death her marriage name was Brown. She was buried in the old family burying ground on the Ionia Farm near the old well which supplied water for the old log cabins. Fare Thee well my dear devoted mother, we hope to meet you in that great getting up morning where partings will be no more. Peace to her ashes and rest to her soul.

I had never known my father until his return from Canada to Richmond. I do not know his age, but I believe that he was born in Richmond. I visited him shortly after his return and was received with great joy, but not until he had given me a licking which he claimed was due me when I was a child. Although I was now married and the father of two children he told me humorously

VERIFIED P. 142 "LOUISA COUNTY DEATHS" "MARISSIE BROWN",  
 (RECORDED DATE) COLLEGE. SEP 10 1874. KILLED BY CART. HUSBAND JOS. BROWN



that he must discharge his duty to me as a father, whereupon he gave me five blows with his walking stick. He then presented me to his wife and for three weeks I stayed with them being entertained generously. While I was staying with father he made out papers giving me a legacy consisting of his fine gold watch, a splendid library and \$482. deposited in the Freedman's Bank in Richmond, Virginia, this he said would come to me at his death. At the end of three weeks I left Richmond and went to West Virginia to work on the railroad running from Richmond to Huntington, West Virginia. Some time later I went to Ohio still continuing in railroad work. While I was in Ohio my father died in Richmond, Virginia, but I did not hear of his death until nine months after his burial. On November 20, 1873, I left Ohio and came home to Louisa Co. Virginia, took the papers given to me by my father and proceeded to Richmond, where I found that my father's wife had disposed of everything and moved to another section of the city. I found my father's youngest brother Allen with whom I spent the night and on the following morning he accompanied me to call on my father's widow. She told me that when my father was taken sick he had been carried to the hospital and that all his effects were carried with him and that she did not know what become of his personal property. My Uncle Allen disputed this statement but be that as it may I did not get my father's gold watch nor his library. We then went to the Freedman's Bank which I found closed. I was told at the bank that building speculation had closed the business temporarily but that as soon as business adjusted itself everyone would receive his money. Needless to say I never received any part of the legacy left me on deposit in the Freedman's Bank. I then left Richmond, going direct to Louisa Co. Virginia, and have not since revisited the city of my birth. Sometime later I consulted Mr. William F. Gordon, a prominent

lawyer in Louisa Co. showing him the papers my father had given me and ask him to try to collect my legacy from the Freedman's Bank on a commission basis. He refused to do this but told me that if I would pay him \$50. in advance he would do what he could for me. Since he was not willing to take a chance of collecting the money for a commission I saw no reason for me to give him \$50. to do what he could for me. So that ended my attempt to collect the \$482. from the Freedman's Bank.

My first wife, Martha Ellen Wilkinson, was a native and resident of the Green Springs neighborhood, Louisa Co. Virginia. There were eight sisters in her family and I knew them all but she was my special choice. We were married by Rev. Albert Powell, pastor of Springfield Baptist Church in Louisa Co. Virginia, on Sunday, August 6, 1870. The ceremony was performed Rev. Powell's Church the same day. We then began the great struggle of married life. We lived in Louisa Co., King William Co. and Spotsylvania Co. My wife Martha Ellen Wilkinson Johnson was the mother of ten children, four children were born in Louisa Co., one girl and three boys, we then moved to King William Co. where we lived three years during which time two more boys were added to our family and also we were saddened by the loss of one boy. We next moved to Spotsylvania Co. where we lived for six years and in this period four other children were added to our family, two girls (twins) and two boys. During this period also we lost another boy and the girl twins passed away. On July 4, 1886 while we still lived in Spotsylvania I suffered the great loss of my first wife Martha Ellen. We had lived together as husband and wife for sixteen years, one month and two days. She was forty-one years old and I was thirty-seven years old at her death.

Martha Ellen Wilkinson Johnson was a good and devoted wife, a kind and loving mother, a good neighbor, a loyal soldier for the Lord Jesus Christ. Peace to her ashes and rest to her soul. After the death of my first wife I took the six children remaining and left them in care of their grand aunt Mrs. Louisa V. Wilkinson. I then started for Cambridge, Massachusetts, where my sister Fannie lived to make a new start in a new environment. I arrived in Cambridge on September 3, 1886 and attended services at the Union Baptist Church the second night after my arrival. Finally I secured employment and remained in Cambridge nearly two years when at the suggestion of my sister I returned to Louisa Co. Virginia, on February 18, 1888 to see my four children who remained of the six whom I had left with their Aunt Louisa. Two had died while I was in Massachusetts. After a few days stay in Virginia, I gathered together my four children and brought them to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where with the aid of my sister Fannie Scott I did what I could to make them comfortable and happy. Today, so far as I know, the four children, one girl and three boys, whom I brought to Massachusetts, are their own woman and men, to do and act as they please, and I as I can. My girl and two of the boys are married, my oldest boy, I know not where he is but hope that he is in the hands of our heavenly Father.

On August 21, 1890 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I took as my second wife Miss Susan Lindsay who was born in Virginia and reared in Washington, D. C. We lived together ten years and five months nine years of which time she was an invalid and a great sufferer. Every medical skill was expended on her, but at last she died. Peace to her ashes, rest to her soul. But my career in life and in the struggle of the world were not yet ended. After the death of my second wife I wandered around until I met Miss Lottie Henderson

who was born in Winchester, Virginia, August 13, 1869. I courted her and we were married on October 8, 1902. She was the youngest or baby of eight children and I call her my baby and she also proved herself a darling. Yes, she is my darling and I am what I am. However we have lived happily like two birds in a nest for nineteen years by the grace of God.

I professed religion and joined Fosters Creek Baptist Church in Louisa Co. Virginia, the Green Springs neighborhood in June 1866. I have tried to live consistently during these fifty-six years. I am now growing old and feeble, the time seems drawing near when I must bid this world adieu and with my God appear, but I must struggle onward until my Master calls, for I may be here to wind up the clock at the centennial, though I have struggled.

Very truly yours,

Moses C. Johnson

February 14, 1922

Copied from his original manuscript and slightly abridged, by his son,

Lauman Ben Johnson,  
19 Woodward Street,  
Everett, Mass.

August 23, 1928

Retyped from photocopy of typed manuscript of son, Lauman Ben Johnson, on March 7, 1990