

Our Johnson Family History



Saxon Crosses dated 653 AD
Sandbach, Cheshire, England.

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The Johnson Family

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Our English Heritage



Matthew Johnson (Jr.)

Born

29 September 1830
Wheelock, Cheshire, England

Married

Jane Elizabeth Townsend
5 October 1869
Stratford, Essex, England

Died

3 May 1911
Oakland, Alameda, California



Jane Elizabeth Townsend

Born

About 1845
Persnore, Worcester, England

Married

Matthew Johnson (Jr.)
5 October 1869
Stratford, Essex, England

Died

About 1870
Michigan

The Cheshire Region



Chester and Sandbach in the Cheshire Region

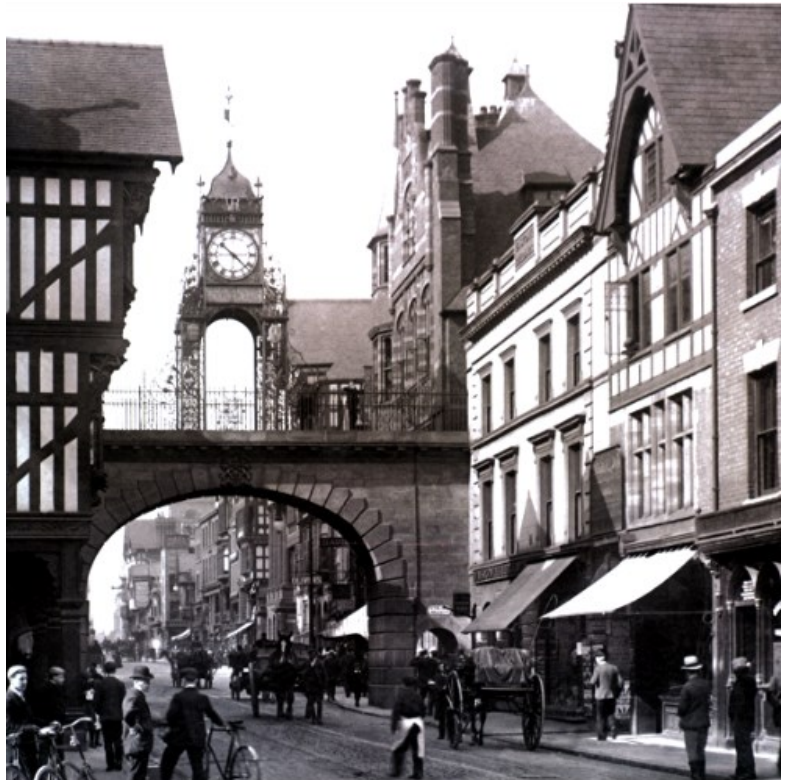
Twelve miles south of the city of Liverpool lies the walled city of Chester, England. It is an old city, dating back 2,000 years to the times of the Roman occupation of this land. Chester is in the county of Cheshire and is situated close to the North-West coast of England, close to the border of Wales. Today it has a population of 80,000 people and is full of quaint shops and many tourist attractions. However, in the 1800s it was a center of commerce and affluence with the port of Liverpool nearby and the major road to Bristol running through the town. Many of the landed aristocracy lived there when England moved into the industrial revolution.

Out of the East Gate of Chester and 20 miles to the east lies the much smaller town of Sandbach. This town was founded in about 653 AD and has two Saxon Crosses in the town square which date back to this period. The inhabitants of Sandbach were converted to Christianity in the 7th century when the Saxons came from the west coast of France and occupied the land. Today it has a population of about 17,000.



This area of Chester is known as "The Cross." The picture was taken in 1903, but the buildings look much the same today. In Roman times several roads met at this spot. A medieval cross stood nearby, which had been destroyed but was restored in 1975.

The East Gate and Clock Tower stand at the exit from the walled city of Chester. The picture, taken in 1900, shows bicycles and the horse drawn carriages traveling along the road which leads out of the city to the small town of Sandbach, twenty miles to the east.



The Family of Matthew Johnson (Sr.)

Our story begins on August 10, 1819 in the town of Sandbach, Cheshire, England. At the Church of England, a festive event was in progress. It was the wedding of Matthew Johnson and Mary Ann Shaw. Mary Ann was almost 18 years old. She had been born in Sandbach to George and Nancy Shaw on November 18, 1801. Now she was getting married. Her husband, Matthew Johnson was born about 1796. He was about 23 years of age and earned his living by selling ironware – pots, pans and utensils – made at a nearby foundry in the small village of Wheelock. We don't know exactly where Matthew was born, but it certainly was in England. Matthew and Mary Ann made their home in Sandbach and, over the next 23 years, she gave birth to twelve children. Three of these died in infancy but nine grew to maturity.

Matthew worked at a number of different jobs in the early years of their marriage including blacksmith, innkeeper, shopkeeper, and grocer. However, when Matthew reached 34, he became an "Iron Founder," which was his line of work from then on. The family then lived on Forgefirth Road (a Firth is a river) in the village of Wheelock near the town of Sandbach. Cecile and I visited Wheelock in 1979 and saw that Forgefirth Road was only two blocks long, and that the iron foundry was at the end of the street, still in operation.

Cecile in
Wheelock,
England on
Forgefirth
Road. 1979



The many births took its toll on Mary Ann. Her last child, a girl named Agnes, was born in August of 1842 and Mary Ann died five years later at 45 years of age. At the time of her death, their nine living children ranged in age from William Johnson, age 25, down to Agnes, age 5. In March 1847, just prior to Mary Ann's death, the family was as follows:

Name	Age in 1847	Birth Date	Birth Place
Matthew Johnson (Sr.)	51	1796	England
Mary Ann Shaw	45	1802	Sandbach, Cheshire
George Shaw Johnson	Died in 1820	1820	Sandbach, Cheshire
William Johnson	25	1822	Sandbach, Cheshire
George Johnson	23	1824	Sandbach, Cheshire
Sarah Johnson	Died in 1826	1825	Sandbach, Cheshire
Thomas Johnson	Died in 1829	1826	Sandbach, Cheshire
Robert Johnson	18	1829	Wheelock, Cheshire
Matthew Johnson (Jr.)	17	1830	Wheelock, Cheshire
Benjamin Johnson	13	1834	Wheelock, Cheshire
Henry Johnson	11	1836	Wheelock, Cheshire
Mary S. Johnson	8	1839	Wheelock, Cheshire
John Clark Johnson	7	1840	Wheelock, Cheshire
Agnes Johnson	5	1842	Wheelock, Cheshire

The two middle sons, Matthew and Benjamin, later immigrated to America. Benjamin went first in 1861 at age 27 and married Amelia E. who had arrived as a girl from England in 1842. They lived in Illinois. Matthew married in England in 1869 and then moved with his new bride, Jane Elizabeth Townsend, to settle in Michigan.

Between the time Matthew's mother died in 1847 and the time he married in 1869, Matthew Johnson (Jr.) moved from Wheelock, Cheshire about 120 miles south to Stratford Upon Avon. There he worked as a commercial clerk. He attended Saint Paul's Parish in Stratford and there met Jane Elizabeth Townsend. She was from the small town of Pershore, about 20 miles southwest of Stratford. Matthew was 39 years old when he married and Jane was apparently a lot younger. Their marriage certificate says that his father was Matthew Johnson, an iron manufacturer, and that her father was William Townsend, a hotel keeper. The story handed down is that her parents were opposed to the marriage, perhaps because of the age difference.



Pershore where Jane lived and Stratford where she married Matthew

Shortly after Matthew and Jane were married, they decided to move to America. Jane became pregnant and they wanted to be established in their new home before the baby was to be born. Since Matthew was familiar with the iron manufacturing business they decided to move to the state of Michigan where there is an abundance of iron ore. Matthew's brother Benjamin lived close by in the state of Illinois. On October 19, 1870, Jane gave birth to their son, Percy Townsend Johnson. We don't know where in Michigan he was born, or exactly where or when Jane became ill. Either she died in childbirth or shortly afterwards. Matthew turned to his brother Benjamin and his wife for help in caring for and raising Percy. Soon after Percy was born, Benjamin and Amelia also gave birth to a son, whom they named Stanley. Percy and Stanley were raised together.



Until Percy was 10 years old, the Benjamin Johnson family lived Bunker Hill, Macoupin County, Illinois. The 1880 census shows Benjamin Johnson, age 46, a hotel keeper, Amelia Johnson, age 44, homemaker, son Stanley H. Johnson, age 8 (born in Illinois) and nephew Percy T. Johnson, age 10 (born in Michigan).

In this picture, Stanley is on the left (age about 4) and Percy is on the right (age about 6).

The same 1880 census shows Matthew Johnson, age 50, living nearby in St. Louis, Missouri working as a railway clerk and living in a boarding house. As often as possible, he would travel to his brother's home and visit with his son Percy. As far as we know, Matthew never returned to England.

Early Life of Percy Townsend Johnson



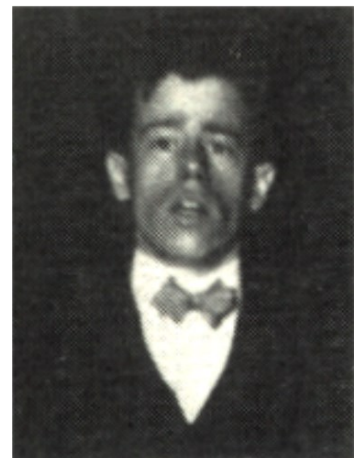
Some time after Percy turned ten years old, he went to school in a place called Weatherford, Texas. This may have been a boarding school since there is no evidence that Benjamin Johnson moved his family to Texas. The class shown here was small. Weatherford was little town near Dallas which today is called Decatur.



By the time that Percy was 30 years old, he was living in St. Louis, Missouri at the home of his cousin Stanley Johnson. Stanley was 28, married and working as a Chief Clockmaker. His wife Jane, who had been born in Missouri, was a homemaker. Percy was still single and was working as a printer. His uncle and aunt were also living in the home. At this time Percy became very interested in a young 19 year old German girl named Amelia Sophia Stumm, who was called Emily. Emily Stumm and her younger sister Ida had been born in Saint Louis though all of their older brothers and sisters were born in Germany. Romance blossomed so Percy and Emily were married on 10 June 1902 at St. Johns Episcopal Church in St. Louis. A beautiful reception was held for the bride and groom by Emily's oldest brother and his wife, Ernest and Augusta Stumm. Percy's father, Matthew Johnson, was present at the wedding.



Percy Townsend Johnson
Married
Amelia Sophia Stumm
On
June 10, 1902
In
St. Louis, Missouri



Percy T. Johnson started his own printing business in the village of Crondelet on the edge of St. Louis. He was a hardworking, fastidious man with excellent manners so was popular with his customers. At home he was very particular that everything run on schedule. Emily was only 14 when her mother died in 1896 and life had been hard for her. She had to scrub the floors, clean the house, cook the food and care for her 11 year old sister Ida. Still, with this training, Emily kept a clean home so Percy was a happy man. Their first child, Alice Jane Johnson, was born March 31, 1903 in St. Louis. Two years later Emily's father, Charles Philipp Stumm, decided to move his family Bookbinding business from St. Louis to San Francisco, California. Ernest and Augusta Stumm stayed behind in St. Louis as did Percy, Emily and Alice, but the rest of the Summ family moved to San Francisco. Emily missed her sisters Bessie and Ida and her brother Emil. Then, a year later, the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 struck. Communication was poor and Emily could not learn of her family whereabouts. So she insisted that Percy sell his business and move to San Francisco so she could locate her family. Florence Elizabeth Johnson was born in San Francisco on February 18, 1909. Emily became ill from the cold weather so Percy moved the family to Oakland.

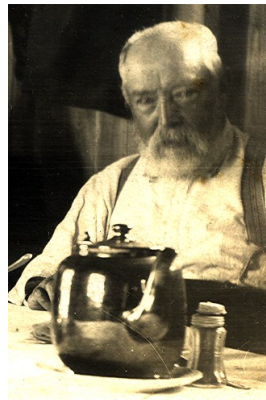


Emily and Florence – 1908



Percy and Alice – 1908

Matthew Johnson also moved from St. Louis to San Francisco so he could be close to Percy and his family. He lived with them until he died on May 3, 1911 in Oakland. He lived for 41 years after the death of his wife, Jane Elizabeth Townsend Johnson.



Percy's father –
78 year old
Matthew Johnson in
1908



Alice Jane Johnson — 1911

When Alice and Florence were growing up, Percy bought a small house at 1722 37th street in Oakland. Alice remembered how her father would commute from Oakland to San Francisco to work six days a week by walking to the ferry, riding it across the bay, and walking from the terminal to the printing company where he worked. Then he would return the same way each evening at precisely the same time. Percy was given an offer to become a supervisor in the typesetting department of his printing company but he turned it down because he didn't want the added responsibility. Though they didn't have much money, their home was always neat and clean and they had enough food and clothing to get along. Percy planted fruit trees and a vegetable garden and he raised chickens to supplement the food they had to buy. Gradually Emily's health improved.

Alice and Florence — 1924
At
Wedding of Alice and Gordon Scribner



Florence Elizabeth Johnson — 1929

Surviving the Great Depression

October 28, 1929 the American Stock Market crashed. It was called "Black Thursday." By 1930 unemployment skyrocketed and long lines of desperate people stood in bread lines to receive a simple ration of food. The 1930 census states that Percy T. Johnson, age 59, was still employed as a printer. Emily S. Johnson, age 48, was then working as a bookbinder in the Stumm Family Bookbinding business. Emily's father had passed away in 1909 in San Francisco, but her oldest brother Ernest Stumm, age 61, was now running the business. Ernest's wife, Augusta Eschle Stumm died in 1918 at age 45 when their youngest son Erwin was only ten years old. Fortunately Augusta's mother, Grandma Eschle, moved in to help raise Erwin while Ernest worked. In 1930, Ernest, his brother Emil, and sisters Bessie, Emily and Ida kept the business afloat. Money was so scarce that every family member who could find work pitched in to help each other. Florence Johnson, age 21, was still living with Percy and Emily and was working as a stenographer. Thus she too helped the family survive.

Alice Johnson Scribner and her husband Gordon were also struggling to keep their family alive. By 1930 they had two sons: David Gordon Scribner, age 4, and Kenneth Jerome Scribner, age 2. Though they wanted more children, they knew it could not happen until the economy improved. Their next son, Douglas MacKenzie Scribner, was not born until eight years late in 1938. Their last son, Stephen Peter Scribner was born in 1945. During these depression years, Gordon worked as an Optometrist. Alice wrote, "*Gordon lost two or three jobs because he wouldn't 'oversell people.' Finally a Sacramento firm of Optometrists opened an office in Hale Brothers Department Store in San Francisco and gave your dad 'carte blanche' in running the office. He stayed there until Pops (Gordon's father, Irvin A. Scribner) finally convinced him to come back to San Diego in 1939.*"



22 Nace Street, Oakland, California

During the late 1930s, Gordon and Alice and their two boys rented the downstairs portion of a house at 22 Nace Street in Oakland which belonged to their friend Myrl Owen. They were living there when Doug (Mac) was born, February 9, 1938. About this time, Myrl Owen wanted to sell the house so Percy and Emily decided to buy it. They sold their home on 37th street and moved into the upstairs portion of the house. Many family gatherings took place in this house in Oakland.

One such family gathering took place in 1939. Percy was 69 years old and Emily was 58. Behind them was Emily's sister Ida and her husband Henry Reichelt. Others at the table that night was Percy's daughter Florence and her husband Henry Neergard, and Ida's daughter Norma and her husband Ernie Hay. Gordon and Alice were not there because they had just moved to San Diego.



Emily aged considerably during the 1930s. Her oldest brother Ernest died in 1935. He had retired from the family bookbinding business and moved to a fruit ranch in Placerville, California. Then, just one year later, Emily's sister Bessie also died. Though she was only 58, Emily's hair was now completely white.

Percy and Emily missed their daughter Alice and her family after Gordon moved them to San Diego. Percy wrote some long letters to Alice and she kept every one. Here are portions of one letter written around New Years Eve and New Years Day, 1939:

Dear Alice and Gordon,

December 30, 1939

This is my last chance to visit with you before "old man time" laughs at me and then makes a dash for the exit.... I wish to thank you for the nice things you sent me for Christmas. The cake and the cookies are very good and we all are enjoying them immensely. Last night mother had the "Pinochle" crowd for the evening. We played cards until 12:30 am. Then mother served salad, cake and coffee with home made cheese sticks which disappeared from the table as if a bunch of ball players had been there. After the "storm" was over, mother suggested more cards and no objections were heard so the contest continued until 2:15 am. – Exit the tired and weary warriors, and enter the dirty dishes and putting the furniture in proper order – for tomorrow the turkey hunters will be here for the last meal they will get in 1939. At 3:15 am the bed hit us in the face so we called it a day.... We all had a nice Christmas but would have enjoyed it more if all the Scribners had been with us.

January 1, 1940

Happy New Year

By the time folks arrived...the dinner was waiting – a fine tender turkey cooked to perfection and with all the necessary attachments to make a grand feed. With Henry, Ida and Ernie on one side of the table; Florence, Henry and Norma on the other side; mother at one end and Ernie's friend and me at the other end, the table was well framed. With four more boards standing in the corner, we still could have had plenty of room for the Scribner clan...

Your Dad, P.J.

The Transition To San Diego

By 1945 Florence and Henry had also moved to Southern California and had settled in Monrovia. Their children, Phillip and Karen, were young so Monrovia was the only home they knew. Phillip Henry Neergard was born in 1941 in Oakland and Karen Alice Neergard was born in 1944 in San Jose so they were ages four and one by 1945. Monrovia and San Diego were about three hours apart so the Scribners and Neergards would often get together at a half way point in Laguna Beach. Finally Percy and Emily decided that they would sell their home in Oakland and move to San Diego to be closer to their children and grandchildren. Percy wrote about this in a letter to Alice:

Dear Alice and Gordon and all the little Gordons,

Feb. 8, 1945

Well, I think I have a secret to tell you, but you all must be very quiet while I tell you all about it, now don't get nervous, for it will not take long to give you all the details. Now Mackie, please stop talking so that everyone can hear – and Kenny, please wake up for I want you to hear – well, we think we have sold the house! (22 Nace Street) The Dickinsons, the family downstairs, say they want to buy the place ... Our trip home from San Diego was uneventful but pleasant. On the "Sleeper" (train) our birth was made up about 9 o'clock and we got to bed early. I think mother rather enjoyed the trip. We were up early and ready to get off when the train pulled into the station. Henry and Phillip were waiting for us and it was raining very hard ...

Your Dad, P.T.J.

Two important family events happened in 1945. Percy and Emily moved to San Diego and settled in a home on Johnson Avenue, close to Alice and Gordon's home on Golden Gate Drive. Then, on August 7, 1945 Alice gave birth to their fourth son, Stephen Peter Scribner. Two years later, Percy and Emily's oldest grandson, David Scribner became engaged to marry Marion Dunn. The wedding was scheduled for January 25, 1948 in the famous Riverside Inn at Riverside, California. As the date drew close, the excitement mounted and Emily wrote this letter to her sister Ida:

Dear Ida,

We are all so excited down here, I just can't find time enough to write. Alice just left Steve with me while she ran to town again – her dress came but she was not satisfied with the alterations ... Her dress and long gloves are aquamarine ... Gordon rented a room for Percy and I to spend the night at the Inn, which is a very interesting place with lots of antiques... I have been sick since Thanksgiving with high blood pressure. The heart is not so good, so I have to drink Sanka and can't do much walking. ... Love, Emily.

Percy and Emily went to the wedding, but she died five days later, January 30, 1948.

Fifteen Years as a Widower

By 1950, Percy was eighty years old. Still, he had the energy to go on family hikes and camping trips like this one in the Trinity Alps. He sold his home on Johnson Avenue and moved into the guest bedroom in our home. He lived there for nearly ten years until he became disorientated and had to be placed in a rest home for the last few years of his life.



Percy, Alice, Gordon, Steve and Doug
1950



Back Row – Irvin, Florence, Percy, Henry and Ella.

Front Row – Karen, Steve, Phillip, Doug and Gordon

1950

The Survivors: The two Grandpas, Irvin Scribner (age 80) and Percy Johnson (age 85) in 1955. Irvin died six years later, in 1961 and Percy died eight years later, in 1963 at 93 years of age.

Percy Townsend Johnson left a legacy of two daughters, six grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. His English heritage adds to our roots of strength.

