

6-27 Frederic W. Johnson. 911

Frederic W. Johnson, who died at his home on Park Street, June 6, 1911, after a brief illness with an affection of the heart, was born in New Caledonia, Monroe County, New York, March 2, 1830.

He had lived in the town and township of Grinnell forty years and his death at the mature age of eighty-one removes one of the oldest residents of the community.

He was of pure England and New England ancestry, being descended on his mother's side from a sturdy Puritan family, remarkable for its longevity.

His father, Samuel Johnson, an English officer who served under Wellington at Waterloo, resigned his commission soon after the battle and came to Western New England.

His mother, Wealthy Baker, was born and grew to womanhood on the family homestead near Pittsfield, Mass., being the fifth in direct descent from Edward Baker, who came to Salem with Governor Winthrop, in 1630, and who was a deacon in the first church there many years.

Soon after their marriage, the soldier from over the seas and his Puritan wife obeyed the call of the West. The completion of the Erie Canal had opened the way to the new lands of western New York. Thither they went to establish a home. Here four children were born, Frederic being next to the oldest.

Being deprived of a father's support and care, when Frederic was about four years old, the mother returned to the old home in the Berkshire Hills and reared her children according to New England standards.

Frederic attended district schools under the schoolmasters of "ye olden time," winning prizes at an early age for scholarship and good conduct. Later he attended the academy at Lowville, New York, and Williston Seminary at East Hampton, Mass. named for the founder of the Williston professorship in Grinnell College.

His superior scholarship and marked aptitude for mathematics early led him to teaching and shortly after he was twenty years of age, he began teaching mathematics in the high school at Pittsfield, that fine old New England town, often visited in those days by the poet, Longfellow, who once lived there, and by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Henry W. Show known to the world as Josh Billings, lived a few miles away. Such preachers as Wayland Hoyt and others who became famous, occupied the pulpits of Pittsfield. Altogether, it was New England at its best. Such was the environment of his early manhood and such were the influences which shaped his character and life.

Then came the call of the West, just as it had come to his father before him. He reached Chicago in 1854, the year Grinnell was founded. The outbreak of Asiatic cholera of that year disarranged his plans for locating in Chicago. Soon after he began teaching in a New England community at Rockford and a year later, at Galesburg. In 1857 he visited Poweshiek County with a view of locating but decided to remain with his mother and sister, then living near Weathersfield, a New England settlement in Henry County, Illinois, from whence W. O. Willard, W. G. Ray, the late Henry G. Little and other well known citizens subsequently came to Grinnell.

Soon after the beginning of the Civil War, he turned his attention to farming, and while he was always a student in habit and a teacher in spirit, he remained a farmer by occupation until the close of his active life.

At Kewanee, Illinois, New Year's Day, 1866, he married Miss Emily V. McConnell, formerly of Lowville, N. Y., who died after a union of more than forty years, October 9, 1906. In 1871 he moved from Galva, Ill., to the farm near Grinnell, where he lived thirty years. In 1901 he retired from the farm to the city of Grinnell, residing in the home which he built at 1433 Park Street.

Five children, who were all present during his last hours, survive to mourn his loss, Frank W. Johnson, Publisher, of Chicago; Emma M. Johnson, teacher of science, Ft. Morgan, Colo. High School; Flora I. Johnson, trained nurse, Alva Oklahoma; Clara R. Johnson, teacher of English, County High School, Gayville, So. Dak, and Albert E. Johnson, letter carrier, Grinnell, Ia. All grew up in this community and three hold degrees from Grinnell College.

He was a quiet man, somewhat reticent in general intercourse, but affable and kind, a good neighbor and a loyal, appreciative friend. He was a close student of public affairs, independent in political views, an unsparing critic of affectation and pretense, well and widely informed concerning the history of the nation, particularly with the history of New England and possessed a memory of almost photographic accuracy of detail concerning men and events.

While not demonstrative in a public way, he took a keen interest in all improvements, material and educational, which have made Grinnell the admiration of the neighboring communities.

He was devoted, above all else, to his home and to his children, whose education and welfare were ever his chief concern and pride. In early life, he joined the Baptist church, and while not actively identified with church affairs in later years, he was essentially Christian, in spirit and deed, a reverent man, of high ideals, and clean personal conduct, whose life was one of quiet helpfulness and whose guiding purpose seems to have been: "So may I join the choir invisible, whose music is the gladness of the world."