Olivia Johnson memorial set

Olivia Johnson, 103, of the Mayflower Home died Sunday evening at the Mayflower's Health Center.

Memorial services will be held at 2 p.m. today in Denison Chapel of the Mayflower Home, with the Rev. Philip J. Ramstad of the United Church of Christ-Congregational officiating.

Following cremation, her ashes will be interred in the Friends Cemetery near Lynnville. Memorials in Miss Johnson's name may be made to the Mayflower Home or to William Penn College and may be left at the Smith Funeral Home.

The daughter of Henry and Melissa Charles Johnson, she was born Sept. 11, 1876, near Laynville. She attended rural school near the family farm and later attended the Lynnville Friends Academy. She also attended the Mayflower's Academy at LeGrand and William Penn College, two years. She was graduated from the Chicago School of Physical Education in 1907.

Following her education she taught school for one year, and in 1910 she returned to Grinnell to care for her parents. She had lived in the Mayflower Hall of the Mayflower Home in 1949 and had lived in the health center since 1969. She was a birthright member of the Society of Friends and was also a member of the United Church of Christ-Congregational.

Survivors include immediate survivors. She was preceded in death by her parents, five brothers and four sisters.

Miss Olivia Johnson--

95 But Living In Present

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"I did what I felt I had to do, and I enjoyed doing it. This has made my life worthwhile."

These are the words Miss Olivia Johnson used to sum up 95 years of her life Sept. 13, two days after she had celebrated her 95th birthday at the Mayflower Home Health Center.

Looks Younger

Although her eyesight is very good and she cannot walk, Miss Johnson looks about ten years younger than her 95 years. Her snow white hair was neatly styled, and she was wearing a corsage presented to her by her great niece, Joan Renaud, as a birthday gift. Her hearing is still very sharp, and her memory very good.

Miss Johnson was born Sept. 11, 1876, on the family farm ten miles south of Grinnell, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Johnson. Henry Johnson was born in Indiana and moved to Grinnell with his family 1851 when he was four years old. Grinnell was not in existenance at that time. The Johnson family was made up of four boys and four girls, and Miss Johnson was the second oldest girl. Four other children born to the family died in infancy.

The farm on which the Johnson family lived encompassed 500 acres but the family did not farm all of the land. Miss Johnson remembers her father saying before his death in the 1940s at the age of 96 that he wouldn't have known how to farm using the methods being used at that time.

'Tyro' School

Miss Johnson started to school in a country school one mile from her home. The school was called "Tyro," but Miss Johnson says she has no idea of where the school got that name. "I started to school when I was six or seven years of age," Miss Johnson relates. "When I was nine, I went to stay with my grandmother and an uncle so that I could attend school in Lynnville.

"I attended the Lynnville schools for three years, the Tyro school was moved one mile west of its former location, closer to the Sugar Creek area, and a new teacher, Mary Buckley, who had attended Grinnell College, was hired as a teacher. My father thought that with the new teacher, the school would be suitable for me to attend, so I moved back and finished the grades there.

"After finishing the grades I went to Penn College Academy for a year. I moved around a great deal then because I wanted to be with my sister, Charlotte, who was then a freshman at Penn College. The next year my sister taught at LeGrand, so I went with her and finished school at the Friends academy there."

Miss Johnson relates that the traveling back and forth between schools was done by Iowa Central train.

Back To Penn

Her sister went back to Penn College then so Miss Johnson also returned to Penn and completed her sophomore year there. The next year Miss Johnson's younger brothers and sisters needed a place to go to school since finding good schools when living in the country was a problem. Henry Johnson solved the problem by renting a cottage in Oskaloosa, and Miss Johnson kept house for her brothers and sisters until they were old enough to be left alone.

When Miss Johnson's charges were old enough to be on their own, she taught in the country schools for a short time and then went to Chicago where she graduated from the Chicago School of Physical Education. She never got to use her teaching training, though, because her mother was in poor health and [illegible] and she [illegible] so she [illegible] home.

Move to Grinnell

The family moved to Grinnell in 1910. Mrs. Johnson died in 1915, and a sister passed away in 1918. Miss Johnson continued to keep house for her father until a beautiful large home on [illegible] Avenue which was owned by [illegible] the Baileys, in a [illegible] on Main Street and [illegible] home they purchased on [illegible] Street.

A sister who had been superintendent at the Cook County Contagious Hospital and Durand Memorial Hospital in Chicago retired and moved back to the home. After their father died the sisters sold their home and bought a cottage. When her sister died a year later, Miss Johnson rented an apartment at the C.A. Blair home. She lived here for seven years before purchasing an apartment in Pierson Hall at the Mayflower Home in 1959. In 1969, Miss Johnson fell and broke her hip, and since recovering enough to be released from the infirmary, has been living in the Health Center.

Remembers Cyclone

Miss Johnson said that although her family wasn't living in Grinnell at the time the cyclone struck June 17, 1902, she can remember the evening. "I was about five years old at the time, and I can remember we had an aunt, uncle and cousins visiting that night. Mother was getting their beds ready for them and I was following along behind her. She looked out the window at the storm which was north of us saying 'isn't that awful, isn't that awful.' The next day we heard the cyclone had hit Grinnell. My parents and aunt and uncle drove up there. I can remember them saying how bad the damage was."

She also remembers the feats of Bill Robinson very well and remembers the day his plane crashed. "Mother thought flying looked very exciting, and she said she would like to fly. Of course, she never did."

Miss Johnson also remembers the Spauldings as prominent people and remembers when they were still making buggies. "There were no paved streets at the time we came to Grinnell," she relates. "They were all dirt. There were mostly wood sidewalks, also. There were very few automobiles when we first moved to Grinnell, but people were beginning to buy them. Spaulding began to manufacture cars but that didn't last very long."

The depression stands out very well in Miss Johnson's mind, and she remember many bank and businesses in Grinnell failing. "Our family suffered along with the rest. It lasted so long."

Keeps Up

While remembering many things about the past, Miss Johnson isn't living in the past at all. She keeps up with things that are happening today and keeps up on the latest books through books for the blind she gets from the Iowa Commission for the Blind free of charge. "I have a record player given to me by the Commission and every two weeks I get a catalogue listing books or records that I can get from Mayle helps me select the books. I get three a week."

SISTER JOHNSON—
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Miss Johnson--

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Miss Johnson has a system for paying the rent so that she can pay them without any help. "The nurse brings them in and takes them out. Everything else I do myself." The book Miss Johnson just completed is "The Money makers," but she says she also "reads" the classics like "Quo Vadis" and "Silas Marner" as well.

'Outlived Generation'

In reminiscing, Miss Johnson says she has "outlived her generation." "My parents, aunts, uncles, most cousins and all of my old friends are gone," Miss Johnson says. "I have new friends I have made here at the Mayflower Home, but my old friends are all gone." Miss Johnson has several nieces and nephews living including Don Renaud of Rte. 3 but few of them live in the Grinnell area. She also has one brother Leland, who lives with his wife in New Virginia, Iowa. Leland is 13 years younger than Miss Johnson.

Miss Johnson said she has worked hard during her life. "I never had to work outside of the home on the farm as some farm women do," she relates, "but I had to work hard inside. We had lots of relatives who visited us, and when you hired people to help you in those days you had to board them.

"I've lived a very full life."