

UNCLE E. V. JOHNSON AND THE SHILOH METHODIST CHURCH

By Granddaughters Agnes Rule Liner and Marjorie Rule Allen

E. V. Johnson, a pioneer who made the "run of 1889" into Cleveland County, was born in Will's Valley, Alabama, March 3, 1846, one of nine children of Joseph and Nancy Edwards Johnson. A genealogical chart shows that his great, great, great, great maternal grandparents were Thomas Edwards, Sr., born 1690, and Isabelle Downing Edwards, born 1714, both of England. His paternal parentage was from Ireland by way of North Carolina.

E. V. Johnson married Martha A. Yeargin, 1866, in Will's Valley. Martha was of Cherokee Indian descent, but her family had not participated

in the "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma. They had chosen to remain in Alabama. Three children were born to this union while they still lived in Will's Valley. They were Anna, Joseph and Jasper. The family then moved to Cooke County in northern Texas, where a fourth child, Mary, was born. Later moves took them to White Bead Hill and to Sorghum Flat, a rural area between Daugherty (now Gene Autry) and Davis, Oklahoma. At that time this was part of the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory. It was in those places that the last five children were born to E. V. and Martha Johnson. They were Minnie, Sydney, Nora, James and John. Martha died in 1882, shortly after the birth of John. She was buried on a hillside near, but just before the development of, the present Sorghum Flat Cemetery near Davis.

After Martha's death, E. V. married Julia Campbell, a widow, who had several children of her own. Unfortunately, she lived but a short time after the marriage and was buried in the Sorghum Flat Cemetery. Some of her descendants still live in the area. E. V. then married Fannie Smith, a widow with one daughter. It was Fannie who helped E. V. raise his large family, and who later outlived him by a number of years.

Many stories have been handed down about hardships suffered by the family during those years in Sorghum Flat. Some concerned the lack of "store-bought" goods and staples, especially sugar. Their chief substitute for sugar was either honey from "bee trees" or Sorghum molasses, for which the area was famous. Other stories are in regard to their relationship with the Indians in the area. One time, E. V. was returning from one of his infrequent trips to get supplies, and for some reason did not reach home before dark. He knew there were Indians in the area and spent the entire night without a fire, sleeping in his wagon concealed in a brush thicket to avoid being attacked.

By 1889, E. V. Johnson had moved his family to the Byars, Oklahoma, area. All of his children were still at home, except his oldest daughter, Anna. She had married John Gibbs and had died shortly after the birth of a son. She was buried in the Sorghum Flat Cemetery.

It was from the Byars neighborhood that E. V. Johnson made the "Run of 1889" fording the South Canadian River on a mule called "Old Beck". A daughter-in-law, Mrs. Ella Scott Johnson, recalls seeing Old Beck around for many years afterwards. E. V. staked a claim to 160 acres of land five miles north of Lexington, and moved his family in covered wagons soon afterwards. It was told to grandchildren that drinking water ran out on the trip and once they drank rain water from cow tracks.

The Johnsons were a very religious family, holding daily devotionals before breakfast as long as E. V. lived. At first the family lived in a half dugout on their homestead until a frame house could be built. No partitions were built in the lower floor of the frame house in order that church services could be held there. In December, 1889, neighbors were invited to the Johnson home for Sunday Services. This practice continued until the first church building in the area was completed about 1891. The Johnsons became highly respected community leaders, and soon were affectionately known as "Uncle E. V." and "Aunt Fannie" to everyone in the entire neighborhood. Uncle E. V. was very much opposed to any unnecessary labor on Sunday, so his wife, daughters, and later, daughters-in-law spent most of their Saturdays

baking for the Sunday dinner. It was common practice for the neighbors who came to Sunday Services to stay for dinner, since most of them would have had to travel some distance in wagons to reach their homes. After the services were moved to the new church, Uncle E. V. still insisted that most of those who attended stop at his home for dinner, since he lived only one-half mile away.

The land for the new church was donated by Uncle E. V.'s brother-in-law, Robert Yeargin. It was located in the southwest corner of his homestead, five and one-half miles north of Lexington. Shiloh, M. E. Church South was the name selected by these two men for this house of worship. The building was constructed of logs and furnished with home-made split log benches, but it did have an organ, according to a letter written by Ethel Hitchcock (now deceased) who had attended church there. Uncle E. V. was the first Sunday School Superintendent. Subscription schools were held there in the church building until public schools were established.

The log church was replaced by a frame building in 1901. Miss Hitchcock wrote that she was present at the "Corner Stone Laying". Some of the early ministers from 1889 until Statehood in 1907 were: M. M. Henry, J. T. Farris, C. F. Roberts, D. W. Hughes, L. J. Amos, G. B. Whitehurst, J. L. Florence, W. B. Pipkin, E. M. Myers, J. L. Sullivan and E. A. Samples.

The frame building burned in 1921, but was quickly replaced by a concrete block building, which still stands. W. L. Fessenbeck made the concrete blocks right on the church site, after a temporary well was dug to furnish the water. Every member gave freely of his time, money and labor. Meanwhile services were held in the nearby New Hope Baptist Church. Shiloh has been listed on both the Lexington and Noble circuits.

Two of eight children that Uncle E. V. brought to the Shiloh Community in 1889, his two oldest sons, Joseph and Jasper, each died at the approximate age of nineteen or twenty and before either was married. The remaining six children all married and lived to a comparatively elderly age, some even to ninety or more. Mary married John Rule, 1894; Minnie first married John Campbell and was later married to J. D. Boston in 1900; Nora married John Boatright, 1904; Sidney first married Rose Massey and later married Fannie Kerns; John married Ella Scott, 1905; and James married Minnie Foster of Tennessee. It is interesting to note these three sons, much in the tradition of their father, all homesteaded land in southwest Oklahoma, where the procedure was to send in a sealed bid to the government for a particular piece of land, instead of having a "run" or lottery. The highest bidder was awarded the homestead.

It was after all of his children were married and established in homes of their own, that Uncle E. V. suffered a stroke and spent many months in ill health, but when ever it was possible he insisted on being taken to church. On several occasions he made the trip on a cot in a farm wagon. Even at death his deep religious conviction was exemplified in that, although he had not spoken even one word for days, he roused and called out, "Thank the Lord, they are all up there." The next instant he was gone. The end had come on March 25, 1909, and he was buried in the cemetery that adjoins his "beloved" Shiloh.

His obituary in a local newspaper identified him as Uncle E. V. Johnson, and eulogized him with the following:

"No better man inhabited this mundane sphere than he, and his death is a distinct loss to the county, community and his family. No man stood higher in the estimation of his friends and neighbors. He was a devoted Christian and his acts through life showed the true Christian spirit. While he has gone from our midst, his living has made the world better and his pure life will ever stand as a monument and guide to his numerous friends and acquaintances."

Known descendants of E. V. and Martha Johnson number 130 to the fourth generation. Cleveland County descendants include: great grandson Kenneth Boston of Lexington; grandchildren Jess Boston, Idabelle Boston Burkett, Marjorie Rule Allen, and Agnes Rule Liner, all of Norman; and great granddaughter Juanita Bullock Feuerborn of Norman.