

Natchez National Historical Park

National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior



Between Two Worlds: The Life of Free Black Diarist William T. Johnson



Curriculum Guide



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Between Two Worlds:
The Life of Free Black Diarist William T. Johnson

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The William Johnson House, the 1840s home of the free black barber and diarist, is a unit of Natchez National Historical Park. The other park sites include the antebellum estate Melrose, and the site of colonial Fort Rosalie. Natchez National Historical Park interprets these sites so that present and future generations can enjoy learning about Natchez, Mississippi, and the significant role the city played in the history of the South.

The William Johnson House at 210 State Street is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission is free. Groups of 15 or more are encouraged to call ahead. The site includes interactive exhibits, audio programs, and furnished quarters. The William Johnson House is wheelchair accessible, and received a National Accessibility Award in 2005 for its universally accessible exhibit design and fabrication. The National Park Service offers free, curriculum-based education programs for elementary and high school students by appointment. Please call Natchez National Historical Park at 601-446-5790 or 601-445-5345 for more information.

COVER PHOTO: William Johnson and McCallum Houses on State Street in downtown Natchez. Photo by Kristin Tedder.

The suggested activities and components in this guide and CD are created to help teachers meet The National Council of Social Studies' "Interdisciplinary Social Studies Theme Standards," including:

- ❖ Guides learners as they predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames and references.
(Matrix 1.1 Culture and Cultural Diversity)
- ❖ Guides learners as they systematically employ processes of critical inquiry to reconstruct and re-interpret the past using a variety of sources and checking their credibility, validity and weighing evidence for claims, and searching for causality.
(Matrix 1.2 Time, Continuity, and Change)
- ❖ Enables learners to analyze the role of perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs in development of personal identity...helps learners to identify, describe, and express appreciation for the influence of various historical and contemporary culture on an individual's daily life...
(Matrix 1.4 Individual Development and Identity)
- ❖ Helps learners understand the concepts of role, status and social class and use them in describing the connections and interactions of individuals, groups and institutions in society.
(Matrix 1.5 Individuals, Groups and Institutions)
- ❖ Enables learners to examine the rights and responsibilities of the individual in relation to his or her family, social groups, community and nation.
(Matrix 1.6 Power, Authority and Governance)
- ❖ Helps learners analyze the role that supply and demand, prices, incentives, and profits play in determining what is produced and distributed in a competitive market system.
(Matrix 1.7 Production, Distribution and Consumption)

To learn more about curriculum based education programs offered by the National Park Service, please visit the following web sites.

<http://www.nps.gov/learn/curriculum.htm>

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/NR/twhp/>

<http://www.nps.gov/interp/parkclass>

Treasures in the Attic

For more than seventy-five years, fourteen journals, dating from 1835 to 1851 were kept in a trunk in the attic of a Greek Revival town house at 210 State Street, Natchez, Mississippi, unknown to anyone except the author's descendents. This extraordinary set of documents, including notebooks and leather bound volumes, was penned by a "free man of color," William Tiler Johnson, a Natchez barbershop owner, farmer, and businessman. The eventual publishing of these journals is a milestone in African American studies, for they comprise the best autobiographical account of a free black in the Deep South prior to the Civil War.

What emerged from that trunk of documents is a story of enormous interest to historians—it is a story of a man whose freedoms were greatly restricted, and yet he prospered. A man who was born enslaved, yet, as an adult would own slaves himself. A man who seemingly accepted the laws that bound him to an inferior status in his society; in the end, the man who took Johnson's life, walked free because of those laws.

It is also a story about the life of antebellum Natchez, Mississippi, the one-time center of the Cotton Kingdom. Johnson talks about his town and its colorful citizens through accounts of everyday life which are historical, sometimes horrific, and often mundane.

Today Johnson's home is a unit of Natchez National Historical Park, established by Congress in 1988. The enabling legislation directs the National Park Service to preserve and interpret sites and structures associated with all the peoples of Natchez and the surrounding area, from earliest inhabitants to the modern era, both slave and free. A visit to the William Johnson House reveals a man living between two worlds: the world of white slave-owners, and the world of black slaves.

Monday January 12th 1836 -
 Some Light Rain in the Morning. The Stoves did
 not work at the shop for he had been Burnt out
 out yesterday Night. I sent Bill Rice to work
 in his place - he made \$4.37 1/2. Mr gave him 10 Cents
 for Mr. Dunns Servants taken up by the Padroll a
 white man taken up that left there. One in
 evening. Mr. Stanton's Cotton Yard was set on
 fire or there was an attempt to set it on fire in the
 Noon Day time by some Daring Rascal or others -
 Mr. Mills Stable was found with fire in some
 part of it in the evening also. I went out
 about 9 O'clock at Night. I garded my yard until
 12 O'clock - the Padroll took up 12 or 15 persons about
 the street. - Col. Throckmorton returns from Jackson
 Late at night - Big Town Meeting

Tuesday January 13th 1836 -
 rained Last night Late in the night. Some
 rain this Evening not a heavy rain. I learned
 Dr. Welding paid for 4 Days & only. The Commis
 Examined John Williams & Family, two other Blacks also
 the white man that was taken up at Mrs. Cornells, also
 the Servants they were all acquitted and Discharged. It
 was thought that the fire was the Effect of Accident.
 I was out on gas in my yard until 10 O'clock
 precisely at their Command. Raining - and I used to
 wear the white man's clothes I was along the street
 drunk making a noise. The fire burning to put him
 in the Jail House he then called off as promised to
 go home. I gave him a Razor Stone for 10 Cents
 Fleming paid \$1.50 I gave a gold piece worth \$1.00
 away to some one through a mistake for 10 cents

Figure 1. Page from one of William Johnson's journals, January 12-13, 1836. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Born into Bondage

William Johnson was born into slavery in 1809. His father was most likely the white slave-owner Captain William Johnson, who also owned young William's mother Amy and sister Adelia. Amy Johnson was freed in neighboring Vidalia, Louisiana in 1814, and raised her two children while working as a peddler. Sister Adelia was freed in Philadelphia, PA in 1818 and married the free black barbershop owner James Miller two years later. In 1820, Captain Johnson successfully petitioned the Mississippi state legislature to free eleven-year old William. The petition read that emancipating the enslaved child would justify "that disposition of his property most agreeable to his feelings and consonant to humanity . . ." and would give "that liberty to a human which all are entitled as a birthright, and extend the hand of humanity to a rational creature. . . ."

Young William learned the barber trade under the tutelage of brother-in-law James Miller, who was a well-respected businessman in Natchez and became, in essence, a father figure to William. In 1828, nineteen-year old Johnson bought his own barbershop in Port Gibson, Mississippi and operated it for two years. In 1830, Johnson bought Miller's six-chair Main Street barbershop in Natchez when Miller and Adelia moved to New Orleans. Johnson was well on his way to relative prosperity and elevated status in the heart of his hometown of Natchez.

To the Honorable The Senate and House
of Representatives, of the State of Mississippi
in General Assembly convened

The Petition of William Johnson
respectfully represents, that your Petitioner being
possessed of a mulatto woman named ^{Amey} was induced
from her good conduct and fidelity, to have her
emancipated according to the Laws of Louisiana;
your Petitioner at the time he emancipated the
said Amey, was desirous of emancipating her (his
name is William, but was prevented in account
of his minority, and consequent incapacity to exe-
cute a Bond as required by the existing Laws.

Your Petitioner has long resided in the St.
of Mississippi, and has been fixed his per-
manent residence - He is not indebted to any one, who
would render the act of emancipation improper
or unjust. Your Petitioner humbly prays your
Honorable Body to permit him to make that
disposition of his property most agreeable to his
feelings & consonant to humanity - The act will
give that Liberty to a human being which all
are entitled to as a Birthright & extend the hand
of humanity to a rational Creature, on whom
unfortunately Complexions, Customs & even Law
in this Land of freedom, has inspired to rivet the
fetters of Slavery. Your Petitioner prays, that
your Honorable Body will pass a Law emancipate
the Boy William, and your Petitioner as in duty
bound will ever pray &c.
January 21. 1820. William Johnson

Figure 2. Petition to free William Johnson. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Johnson's Natchez

Natchez, Mississippi has a turbulent and fascinating history. Natchez was initially inhabited by the mound-building Natchez Indians for centuries. It is the oldest permanent European settlement along the Mississippi River. Because of its strategic location upon a two hundred-foot bluff, the French built a fort and settled Natchez first in 1716. In turn, the British and Spanish occupied Natchez, followed by the United States at the end of the century. Because of the convenient river access for travel and trade, and the adjoining fertile lands for cultivation, by 1820 Natchez became the symbolic capital of the Cotton Empire in the South.

Although Natchez certainly had a reputation as a rough and tumble frontier town, the city also had a remarkably cosmopolitan tone. By 1830, the Under-The-Hill riverfront, once notorious for its brawling river boatmen, gamblers and scarlet women, had been tamed, replaced by a busy commercial area where steamboats docked and cotton shipments were prepared.

The town on top of the bluff was diverse and in many ways dynamic. Natchez offered such amenities as theatres, banks, and printing offices. The wealthy planting elite lived in large mansions in town as well as just outside Natchez. There were also middle-class shop-owners and tradesmen, and foreign-born citizens from Ireland, Germany, France and Italy. About a third of the city's inhabitants were enslaved. In addition, there were more than two hundred free "people of color"—the largest population of free blacks in Mississippi.

SLAVES! SLAVES!! SLAVES!!!
FORKS OF THE ROAD, NATCHEZ.

THE SUBSCRIBERS have just arrived in Natchez, and are now stopping at Mr. Elam's house, Forks of the Road, with a choice selection of slaves, consisting of

MECHANICS,
FIELD HANDS,
COOKS,
WASHERS AND IRONERS, and
GENERAL HOUSE SERVANTS.

They will be constantly receiving additions to their present supply during the season, and will be sold at as reasonable rates as can be afforded in this market.

To those purchasers desiring it, the Louisiana guarantee will be given.

Planters and others desirous of purchasing, are requested to call and see the Slaves before purchasing elsewhere. nov27—d:wtf **GRIFFIN & PULLUM.**

Mules! Mules! Mules!

JUST ARRIVED, and in excellent order. a large lot of MULES, raised in Missouri, and recommended for their size and condition.

They can be seen at the mule yards of Mr. Joseph E. Kirk, and will be sold on favorable terms. A finer lot of Mules is rarely offered to the public.

nov27—d:wtf **W. H. BIGHTER.**

Figure 3. One of the largest slave markets in the antebellum South was located at the Forks of the Road in Natchez, Mississippi. Courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Free Blacks in Natchez

“Mc came down to my shop in the Evening. I Cut his hair and I Read Governor McDuffee speech to Him – on Slavery and Abolition – We both got tyred of it before I had finished it”

-January 31, 1836-

Most of the free blacks in Natchez, like Johnson, were mulattos. Many were former slaves who were manumitted by their owners. Although they were no longer slaves, the freedoms of free blacks were severely restricted. They could not vote, hold public office, testify against whites or sit on juries in cases involving whites. Most held service-oriented positions that catered to the wealthy white clientele, such as tailors, dressmakers, carriage drivers, and laborers. Free blacks could not sell liquor or serve as a minister. When they traveled, they had to carry “freedom papers” as proof of their status. Any breaking of the

law, or even disrespect towards a white person, could result in imprisonment, deportation, or even re-enslavement. Their qualified “freedom” was, in essence, a gift bestowed by white society that depended upon the support and patronage of whites. It could be revoked if legal and social codes were not adhered to.

Despite the above, a few of the free blacks in Natchez prospered. The “Hackman” (or carriage driver) Robert Smith owned slaves and an impressive townhouse. The Barland family owned substantial wealth in land. Grocery clerk Nelson Fitzhugh held an estate valued at over \$3,000 in 1860. Johnson’s close friend Robert McCary also thrived as a barber.

“The Horrows {Horrors} of the Inquisition”

“...Yesterday Ann Perkins that Committed to Jail some 3 days ago was tried under habeas Copus- She proved that She was of Indian Decent and Came of Clear . . . Big Berry Duncan was Cleared at the same time and was Ordered to Leave the state in thirty Days . . . To day Big Francis and her Daughter was tried I believe and was put in Jail for further notice. . . .”

-August 18, 1841-

In 1841, the fear that a number of free blacks throughout the south were working with abolitionists to steal slaves fueled the controversy Johnson termed “The Inquisition.” Throughout early August, white citizens attended meetings and formed committees demanding the enforcement of a law passed in 1831 requiring all free persons of color between the ages of sixteen and fifty to leave the state of Mississippi. Salvation lay in one’s ability to present city officials with a petition signed by respectable white freeholders attesting to the applicant’s good character and honesty.

While Johnson watched in disbelief, city courts refused a number of his fellow free black residents permission to remain. Johnson and his family remained safe, however, having already complied with the law ten years earlier. In 1843, when Natchez residents filed a petition with the state requesting the decision of the county court to deny Robert Smith

and others permission to remain be reversed, legislators not only agreed to reverse the law for Smith but passed a law allowing other free blacks to stay as well.



Figure 4. The arrest of Nat Turner. After a slave insurrection led by Nat Turner in 1831, resulted in the murders of over 50 whites, states like Mississippi enacted stricter laws on the freedom and movement of free blacks. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The Barber and His Business

“Business pretty Good to day. Dr McGowan paid me his years Shaving to day, \$15.00...There is a great deal of Rascality a going On among a Certain Crowd, and I am a Looker on in Venice. Closely, I shall be a match for any Set of Rascals that may make me unhappy, Journeymen & Barbers&c”

-March 29, 1851-

Johnson’s Main Street barbering business thrived within a few years. He rented an old building for his shop but eventually replaced it with an impressive three-story brick structure. He purchased the lot as well. By 1834, he had bought and installed a four-tub bathhouse to take advantage of rising health awareness. He charged clients 12 ½ cents for a shave, 25 cents for a haircut, and 75 cents for a bath. He even opened up a toyshop in one of the vacant rooms.

By 1840, Johnson’s shop was surrounded by significant businesses and governmental buildings. There were three hotels, two banks, an auctioneer, the courthouse, and “Lawyer’s Row” all within three blocks. His clients, mostly men, included the wealthy white elite as well as other free blacks who enjoyed perfumes, fancy soaps, oils, and pomades. Most of all, they enjoyed an informal men’s club of sorts, a place where business was conducted, news and politics were debated, and gossip (or “sly talk” as Johnson termed it) flourished.

Johnson’s business dealings, inventories, and accounts clearly dominate his journals more than any other topic. He meticulously recorded almost every sale, purchase, or loan that he made. Whether he reaped a good profit during a “brisk” period, or suffered a loss during a Yellow Fever epidemic, Johnson noted it all.

In addition to haircuts and shaves, Johnson also loaned money to both white and free black clients, sold merchandise like cigars and toothbrushes, bought and sold slaves and,

for the final years of his life, owned and farmed a small plantation he named “Hardscrabble.”

Although Johnson prospered, he was restricted in business as he was in almost all aspects of his life. Free blacks in general were confined to providing services to white clientele in a subservient role. Yet, Johnson diversified his investments, and succeeded despite the obstacles he faced. As his business grew increasingly lucrative Johnson enjoyed more free time with friends and family.

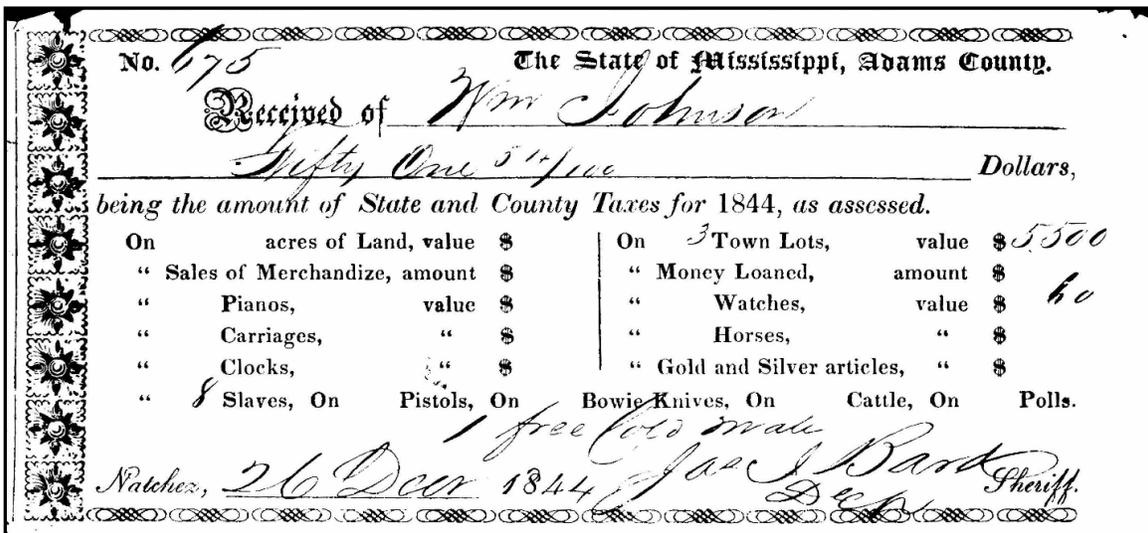


Figure 5. Tax receipt from 1844, listing Johnson's property. This property included pianos, carriages, horses, clocks, watches and slaves. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Sportsman

“To day I took the boys and went into the Swamp and I Killed one of the Largest Kind of an Aligator in the Aligator Lake. He was a Buster in any Country, I tell you...”

-November 17, 1839-

Johnson approached his leisure much as he did his business – with a desire to compete and prosper. He once referred to himself as “the old shark,” and boasted, “I always Beat the Crowd that I go with, and no mistake.” Whether it was hunting game with a close friend, the white Greek immigrant John Jacquemine, shooting shuffleboard for cigars with fellow free black barber Robert McCary, or betting at the racetrack with the white, aristocratic planter Adam Bingaman, Johnson loved to play and played to win.

Aug 6, 1839. R. J. WAGENER.

RACES! RACES! RACES!



PHARSALIA COURSE, NATCHEZ.
SWEEPSTAKES.

NOVEMBER 20th—1 mile heats for 2 year olds, \$300 entrance, \$100 forfeit.
November 21st—1 mile heats for 3 year olds, \$300 entrance, \$100 forfeit.
November 22nd—2 mile heats for 3 year olds, \$500 entrance, \$250 forfeit.

Although the above stakes have filled, they are opened until the 1st of September.

JOCKEY CLUB.

The regular fall races will begin on *Wednesday, the 26th of November*, and continue through the week *Wednesday, 26th November.*

1 mile heats. Purse, \$200—entrance added.
Thursday, 27th,

2 mile heats. Purse, \$300—entrance added.
Friday, 28th,

3 mile heats. Purse, \$400—entrance added.
Saturday, 29th,

1 mile heats—3 best in 5. Purse, \$200—entrance added.

Col. A. L. Bingaman has seven horses in training.
Capt. Wm. J. Minor has a long string, and has already engaged his stables.
Mr. Paterson will be here with Chas. men Litige, and other good ones.

We also expect the stables from the Coast, Red River, and two from Kentucky.

The prospect for the Fall meeting is cheering to every lover of the Turf.

Aug 13 tr J. B. PRYOR, Proprietor.

Medical College of Ohio.

Figure 6. Advertisement for horse races at Pharsalia racetrack in Natchez. Courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Son, Brother, Father and Husband

“Business was pretty good. Thank God my Family is all well this day and my relations in Orleans and I am very glad indeed. . . .”

-January 1, 1845-

Johnson met his future wife, Ann, through sister Adelia’s friendship with free black washerwoman Harriet Battles. Harriet had been a former slave of banker and planter Gabriel Tichenor, who was probably Ann’s father. Tichenor eventually freed both Harriet and Ann in 1826. Ann Battles married William Johnson on March 21, 1835, and had eleven children.

William Johnson was, undoubtedly, a family man. His journals offer many insights into the dedication, and sometimes frustration, he felt towards his kin. Curiously, his wife Ann is rarely mentioned, but evidence suggests that theirs was a happy marriage, and in the early years the couple traveled, attended the theatre, and took walks and horseback rides together. Perhaps when their children arrived, and Johnson’s business endeavors broadened, they spent less time together. Yet, there is only a brief mention of a quarrel between them, the cause of which was not stated.

Johnson’s relationship with his mother Amy, however, was tempestuous, and even volatile. Amy Johnson herself was much like her son—they both were shrewd business people and both had combative natures. Amy spread rumors about her family, argued with neighbors, and even brawled in the street. At one point, she was arrested for selling spirits, which was banned for free blacks. Johnson records numerous arguments that he had with his mother, including quite violent ones. When Amy died in 1849, however, Johnson’s diary reveals a man torn apart with grief.

Another time of intense sorrow was recorded in January 1848 when Johnson’s beloved sister, Mrs. Adelia Miller, died in New Orleans. Johnson always had a very close

relationship with Adelia and her husband James Miller, and her untimely death plunged the diarist into a moment of incredible despair.

Johnson's happier moments were those spent with his eleven children. He and Ann took great pains to make sure they were well-fed, well-dressed, and educated by private tutors as well as the Johnsons themselves. His daughters received lessons in music and writing. Some of the boys were trained in the skills of the barber trade so they might continue the family business after Johnson's death. Others were trained as blacksmiths. The four oldest children, William, Byron, Richard and Ann were even sent to New Orleans for a better education.

Johnson proudly records such family moments as picnics, birthdays and christenings. The latter was of great importance to Johnson, for the christenings were additional proof of free status and safeguarded the children against being sold into slavery.

Know Johnson

REMEMBER ME.

A Ballad

With Grand Accompaniment

MRS. FRANKLIN

Composed for the (Ed. June 1834)

BY

JAMES PIRSSON.

NEW YORK: Published by DIMEY & STODART 167 Broadway.

Moderato. *p*

When on thy pillow thou recline, May Heav'n's blessing rest on thee.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1834, by Dimey & Stodart, in the Office of the Clerk, of the Secretary of State of New York.

Figure 7. The Johnson Family Papers include sheet music for an 1834 song "Remember Me" by James Pirsson. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Johnson's State Street Home

"I have been Quite buisy all Day—Mr. Brown the Plasterer finished the Kitchen this Afternoon, and Layed One Hearth in Kitchen. Paper Hanger Commenced this morning to Hang the paper in front Room Came very near finishing the Room to day- I Commenced to work on the wooden Cistern to day, stoping up the cracks with tar. . . ."

-March 11, 1841-

Johnson's initial State Street home, which was owned by mother-in-law Harriet Battles, burned in 1839. Johnson began work on his three-story Greek Revival home at 210 State Street the following year. Many of the bricks used for its construction were salvaged from buildings that were destroyed during the tornado that struck Natchez in 1840, including Parker's Hotel, which stood across the street.

In typical business fashion, Johnson rented out the first floor of his house, while he and his family lived in quarters on the second floor. These rooms witnessed many joyous and somber moments of Johnson's life—the births of eight children and the death of one, as well as music, laughter, and the occasional quarrel or scolding. The house would remain in the Johnson family for over 100 years.



Figure 8. The parlor of the William Johnson House aptly reflects the comfortable lifestyle enjoyed by the diarist and his family. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.

The Enslaved

“Buisness Tolerable fair, I was at auction to day at the Sale of Mr. Philomel Greens, 20 hands. They were sold at the Court House in Lots or Families . . . I Bot an old man by the name of Ned for Only fifteen Dollars”

-February 27, 1850-

Johnson owned fifteen slaves at the time of his death. Mother-Amy bequeathed seven to him upon her death; others were purchased by Johnson at various slave markets in Natchez. The male slaves labored to build Johnson’s home, worked his farm, and served in his barbershop. Johnson would hire out slaves to business associates as well. The female slaves worked under the supervision of wife Ann, cooking, sewing, washing clothes and tending gardens.

Johnson, despite being a former slave, was in many ways a typical master. The obedient slaves received praise, cash, gifts and even passes to circuses and other events in town.

Johnson also taught his slaves how to read and write so they could be more useful to his business.

Johnson could be very harsh as well. Of all of Johnson's slaves, Steven brought his master the greatest trouble and personal anguish. Intelligent and not easily submissive, Steven was an alcoholic. His chronic drunkenness led to arrests, imprisonment, and frequent punishments from Johnson himself. These punishments escalated from scolding to chaining and whipping. Johnson even placed Steven in a chain gang. Knowing that Steven's behavior jeopardized his own freedom, Johnson eventually sold Steven. Passages from Johnson's journal describe his feelings:

“I rested bad Last night. I had much Care On my mind. . . . I got up Early and took Steven with me down to the Ferry Boat and gave him up to the Overseer of Young & Cannon. . . . I gave Steven a pair Suspenders and a pr of Socks and 2 Cigars, Shook hands with him and see go On Bourd for the Last Time I felt hurt . . . if he had Only have let Liquor alone but he Cannot do it I believe. . . .”

-January 1, 1844-

The overwhelming dilemma posed by Johnson's life for historians and students alike is why would a man who was born enslaved choose to enslave others? Why didn't he free his slaves? How did he feel about slavery as an entrenched institution in the antebellum South? These questions are not easily answered. Although Johnson's journals record his everyday dealings with his slaves, including the rewarding or punishing of individuals, they do not record his personal opinions about the politics and morality of the institution as a whole. Johnson, like most men of his age, however, desired to elevate himself in his society—a society that measured success by the ownership of land and slaves.

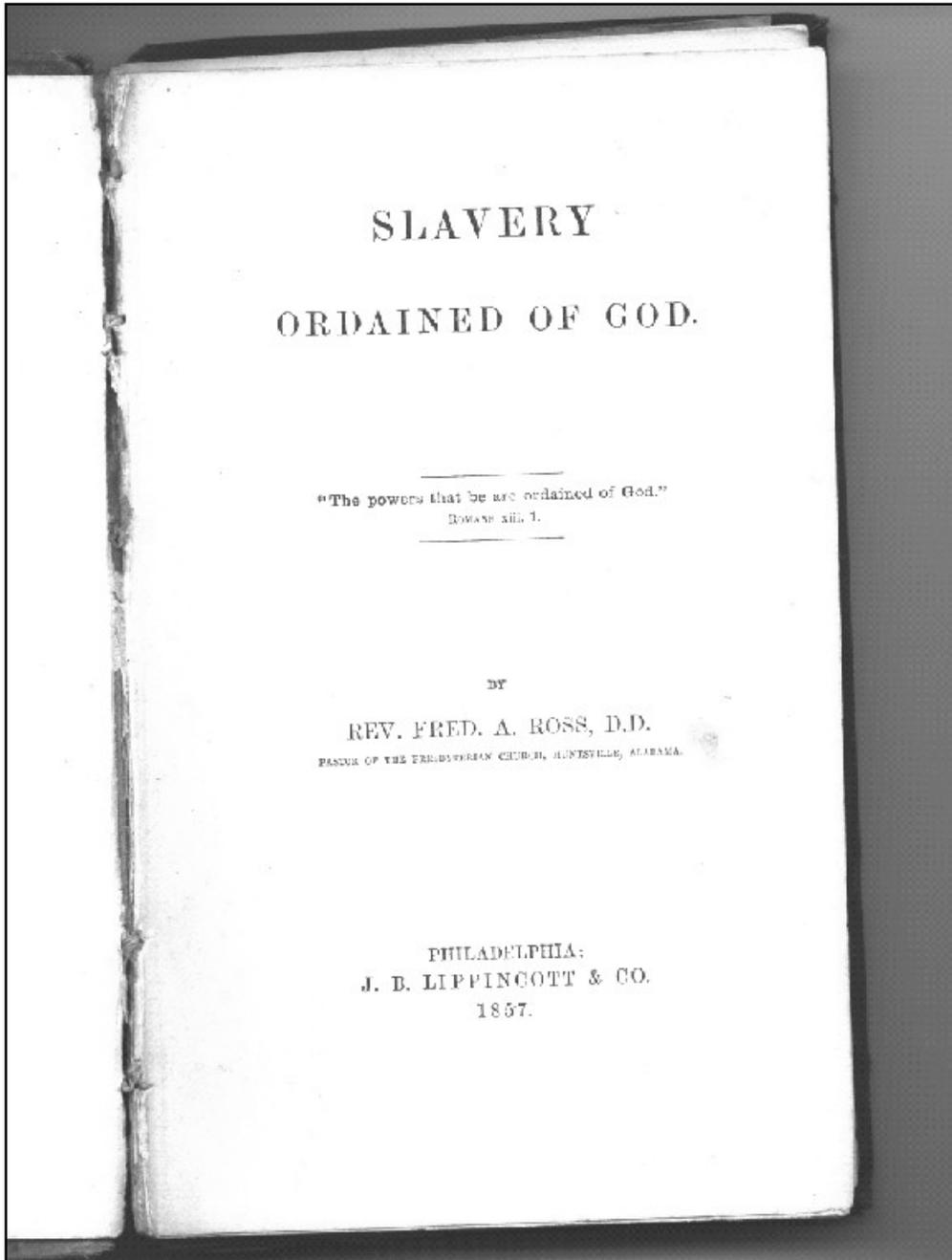


Figure 9. Fredrick Ross' *Slavery Ordained of God*, a Biblical defense of slavery, belonged to the Johnson family. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.

Talk of the Town

“Judge Quitman & Mr. Bengancon has a fight. Mr. Bengancon made a thrust at him that would have killed him had not a piece of Silver in the Pocket of the Judge arrested the Progress of the sword, They were separated by the Sheriff or some other Gentleman or two—Dr Benbrook and Mr. Rivers has a fight The Dr Struck Rivers first with a stick, then Rivers struck him with a Large walking Cane with Both hands a hold of it which Knocked the Dr as flat (as) a flounder, and Struck him twice after that whilst he was down, As soon as he Came to his sineses he hallowed Murder Like a man that was getting murderd”

-September 9, 1837-

Barbershops have always been a central place for discussing news and gossip. As a barber and well-known figure in town, Johnson was privy to much information, which he faithfully recorded in his journals. He wrote about circuses and plays, of births and deaths, and of weddings as well as infidelities. He also recorded historical events, like General Andrew Jackson’s visit to Natchez, as well as calamities, such as tornadoes and epidemics. In doing so, he paints a vivid portrait of the city and its colorful citizens.

Although references to the planter class of Natchez abound, Johnson was careful not to scandalize the town’s leading white citizens. Always aware that his free status was conditional, perhaps Johnson was being cautious about what he wrote even in private as to not offend the wealthy white elite out of concern for the safety of himself and his family.

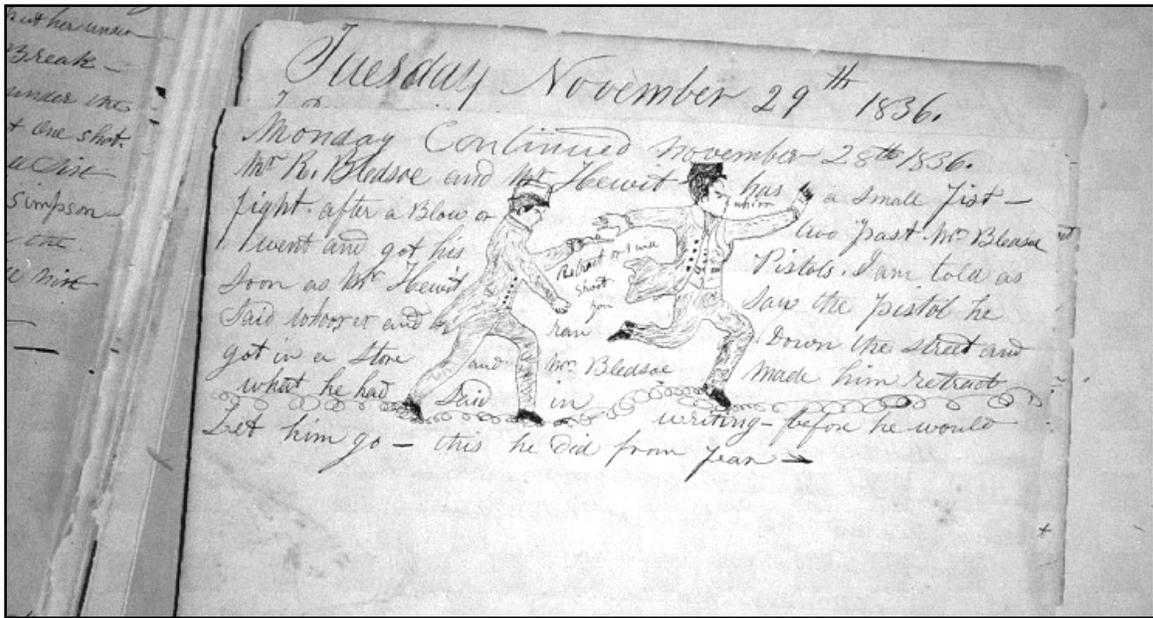


Figure 10. Johnson meticulously recorded details about fights and brawls in Natchez, often adorning the pages of his journals with sketches of the events. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

The Political Climate

“This has been a Beautiful day and Nothing new. Plenty of Excitement to day on the Election &c. I have made Several Bets on the Election to day and to night and some of them Pretty wild ones, I do think—I have made so many Bets on this Election that I cannot now Recollect them all”

-November 2, 1847-

Johnson lived in an exciting age of turbulent politics. The local issues of state’s rights, banking laws, and re-districting of counties, and the national issues of the Mexican War, economics and abolition kept the barbershops as well as the streets of Natchez buzzing with chatter, heated arguments, and sometimes a duel or brawl. Natchez witnessed numerous political rallies, parades, and speeches, climaxing with the spirited campaign of William Henry Harrison in 1840, when the Whig party built a log cabin on the bluff and rolled a huge ball through the streets to drum up support for “Old Tippecanoe.” Johnson viewed such spectacles with scorn, dismissing them as “Pomp and Nonsense and Splendid Foolishness.”

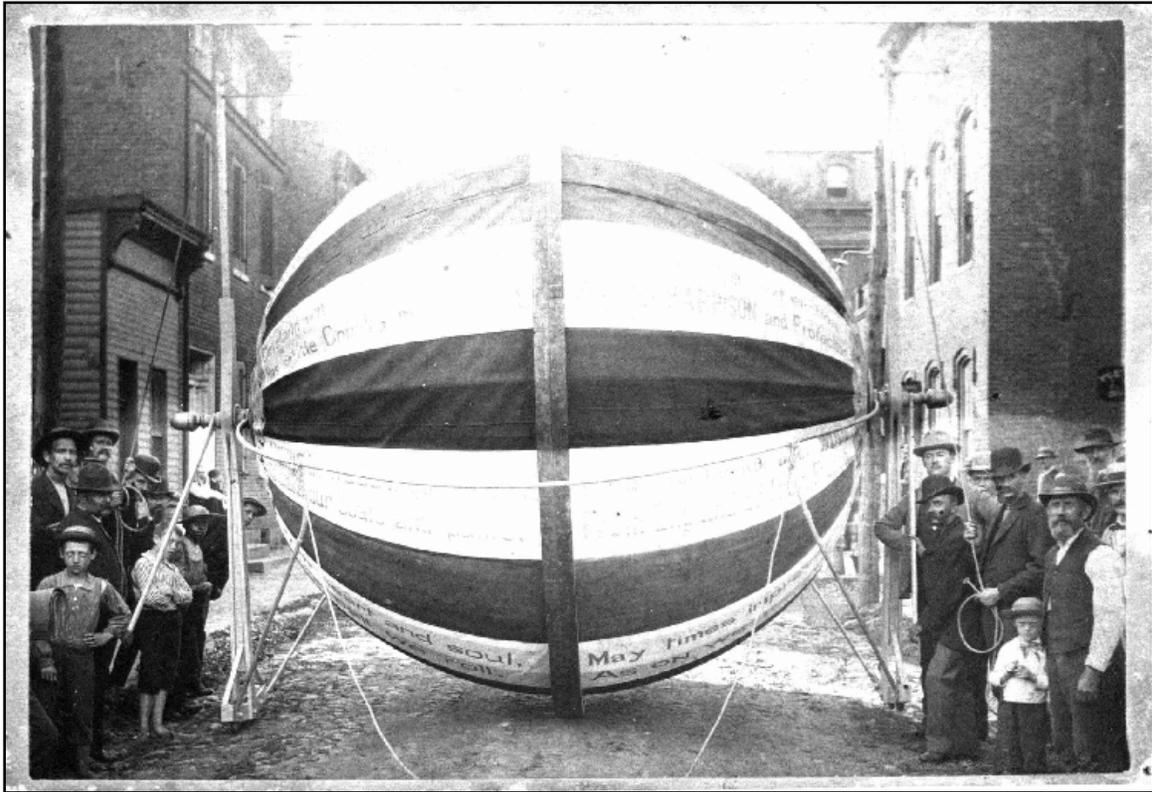


Figure 11. Nineteenth-century photograph of a campaign ball, probably similar to the one that rolled through Natchez during the presidential election of 1840. Courtesy of the Herman and Stacia Miller collection, City of Cumberland, Maryland.

Although he could not vote, the political theatre undoubtedly fascinated Johnson, and his journals note his opinions of political speeches. He expressed admiration for many of the Natchez politicians (notably General John Quitman and Johnson's friend Adam Bingaman), as well as scorn for others. Almost absent from his diary, however, are references to the biggest political and moral issue of his age—slavery. Only once does Johnson mention reading a speech on abolition, and he never expresses his opinion of it.

On June 30, 1837, Johnson recorded Vice President Richard Johnson's political creed. Although the words were not his own, the free black barber clearly believed in them.

"The Basis of Our Free Insti[tu]tion"

No Privileged orders-Liberty of Speech-Freedom of the press-The rights of conscience-Strict Construction of the federal Constitution-Universal Suffrage-Responsibility to the people-No imprisonment for debt-And a general Diffusion of Knowledge among all Classes of the People"

Richard M. Johnson

By William T. Johnson

The Death of William Johnson

"Our city was very excited on Tuesday morning, by hearing that what could only be deemed a horrible and deliberate murder had been committed upon an excellent and most inoffensive man. It was ascertained that William Johnson, a free man of color born and raised in Natchez, and holding a respected position on account of his character, intelligence, and deportment, had been shot."

Natchez Courier, June 20, 1851

Johnson endured a long-standing feud with his neighbor, a free black named Baylor Winn. A one-time friend and occasional hunting partner of Johnson's, Winn owned a large tract of swampland that bordered Hard Scrabble farm. Troubles arose when Winn cut timber in apparent disregard of boundary lines, which angered Johnson. Despite facing bitter resistance from Winn (who apparently threatened Johnson's life), Johnson secured two boundary surveys and moved to sue Winn and his land partner. Before the case came to trial, however, Johnson proposed a compromise that was accepted by Winn and the lawsuit was dropped.

On the evening of June 16, 1851, Johnson rode back to Hardscrabble accompanied by free black apprentice Edward Hoggatt, his son William, and a slave. Gunshots rang out, and bullets struck Johnson in the lungs, back, and arm. After falling from his horse, Johnson was taken to the farm, where he died at 2:00 am. Before he died, he named Baylor Winn as his murderer. William Johnson was buried in the Natchez City Cemetery.

Winn remained in jail for two years and faced three trials. The central issue of these trials was not so much Winn's guilt or innocence, but rather his ethnicity and that of the witnesses. Under state law, blacks could not testify against whites. Winn, although indicted as a mulatto, provided evidence and witnesses that he was white and part Native American, and not black. The two witnesses to the murder were both black and therefore could not testify against him. Although the public was outraged by the murder, Winn was never convicted, and subsequently, walked free.

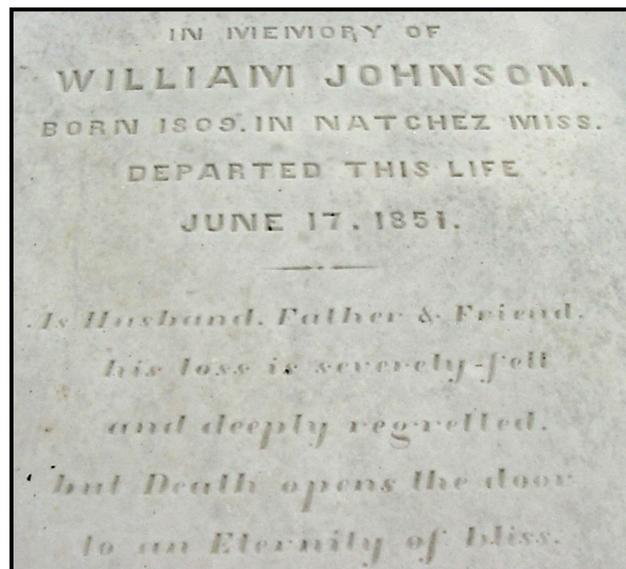


Figure 12. William Johnson's tomb in the Natchez City Cemetery. Courtesy of Southern Custom Exhibits, Inc.

The Family Endures

Ann Battles Johnson, as business-minded as her husband, managed the barbershops, the slaves, and the home after the death of her husband. She eventually sold Hard Scrabble farm. She died in 1866. Eldest son William suffered mental illness and died in an institution in New Orleans. Son Byron joined the Union army during the Civil War. In eerie similarity to his father's death, a man murdered Byron in 1872 over a land dispute.

Youngest son, Clarence, fared better than his two brothers and operated a blacksmith shop in Natchez. He also married Catherine Lynch, the sister of U.S Congressman John Lynch, who was the first African American in Mississippi to be elected to Congress. Clarence's son William graduated from Wilburforce College, and became a doctor. He achieved an education and esteem that would have surely impressed his grandfather.

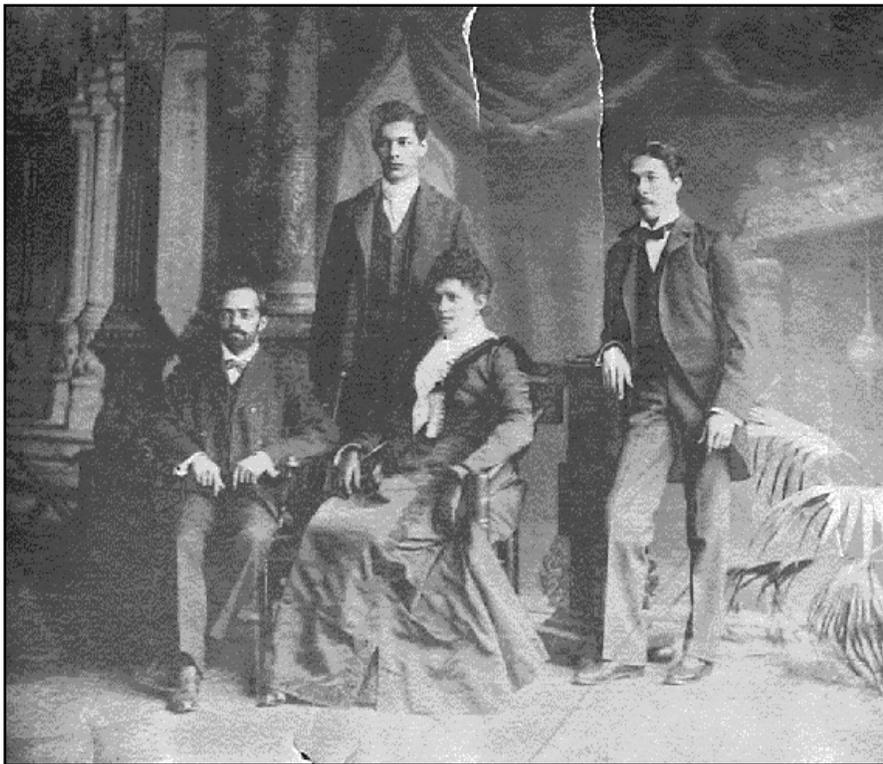


Figure 13. William Johnston, the diarist's grandson, is pictured on the right. The family changed their name to Johnston after the war. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

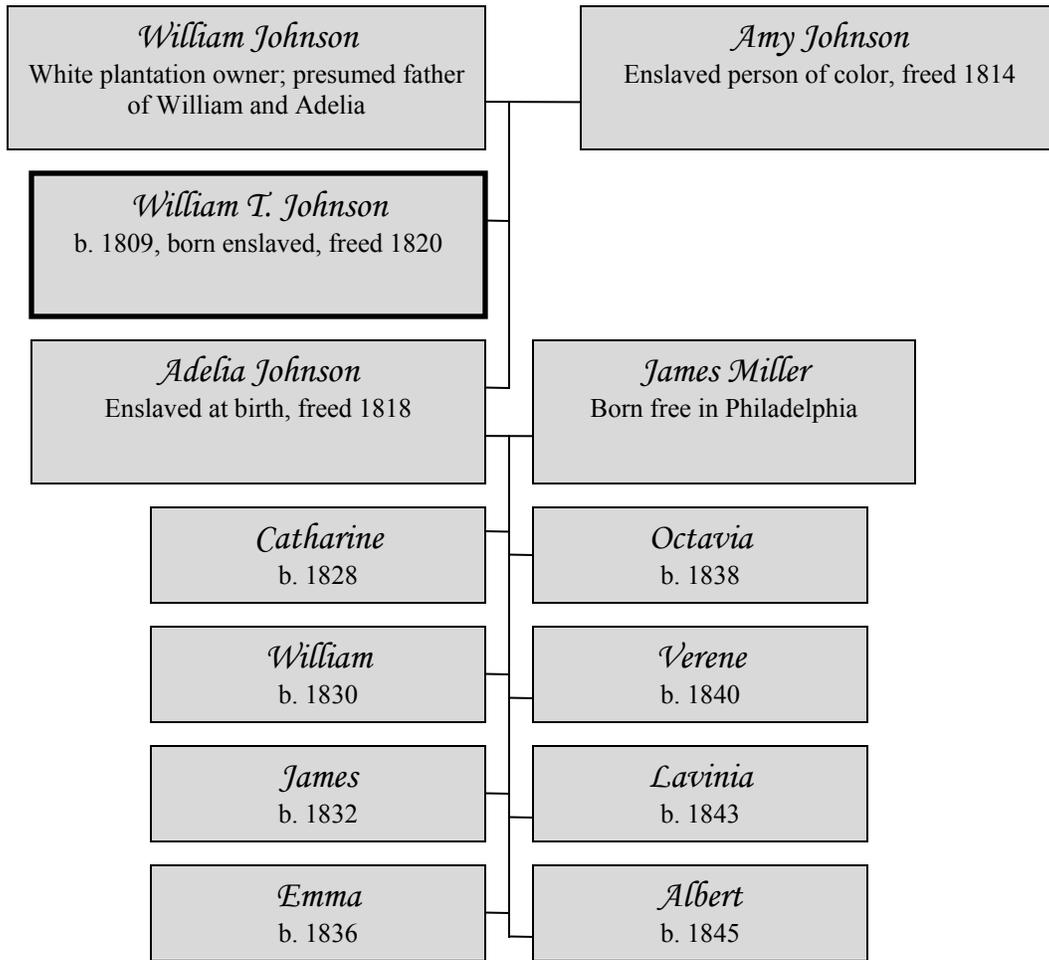
Only one of Johnson's daughters, Eugenia, married. Anna, Catharine, Alice, and Josephine became schoolteachers. Catharine, like her father, kept a diary for ten years, and filled it with observations of the changing times, and mournful lamentations of the past.

“Day is gone and still and silent night is here, the time for calm reflection. Silence reigns over the whole house . . . my mind goes back to the time when we were happy thoughtless children when the earth seemed to be one abode of happiness. I grieve to think how quickly the scene changed. Our home was so happy until . . . No I will not write of that dark time. Suffice it to say it fills my soul with bitterness that will remain forever. I cannot forget & I cannot forgive. . . .”

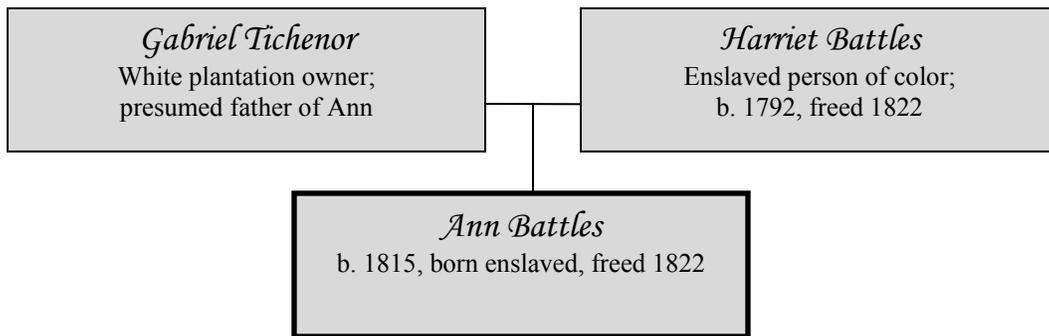
-May 10, 1864-

The Johnson family remained in the 210 State Street home for several generations. In 1976, Johnson's descendents sold the house to the Preservation Society of Ellicott's Hill, a Natchez organization dedicated to historical preservation. The house was later sold to the City of Natchez, who donated it to the National Park Service in 1990. After years of restoration, the house opened to the public in 2005 during the Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration. Johnson's saga as a man caught between two worlds continues to intrigue and challenge thousands of visitors every year.

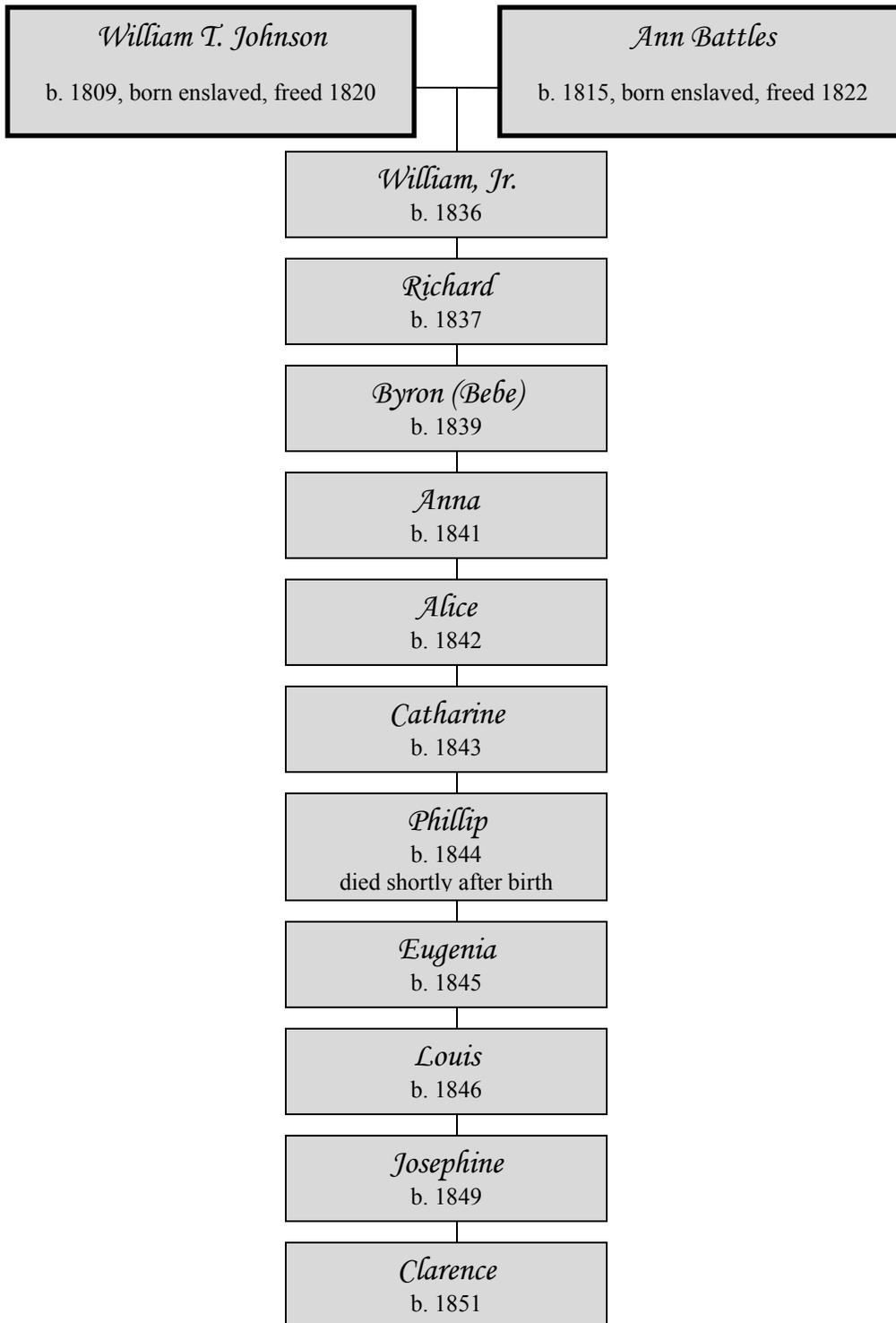
William T. Johnson Family



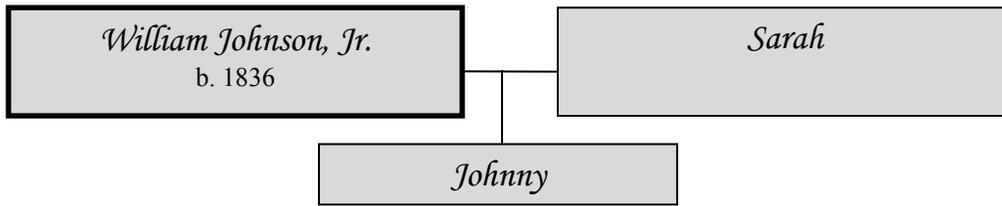
Ann Battles Family



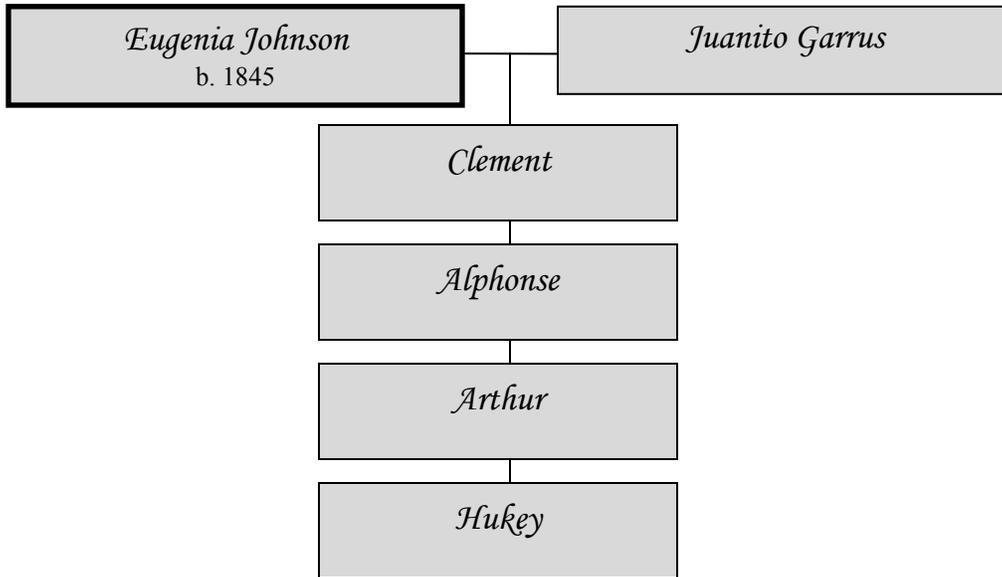
William T. Johnson and Ann Battles Johnson Family



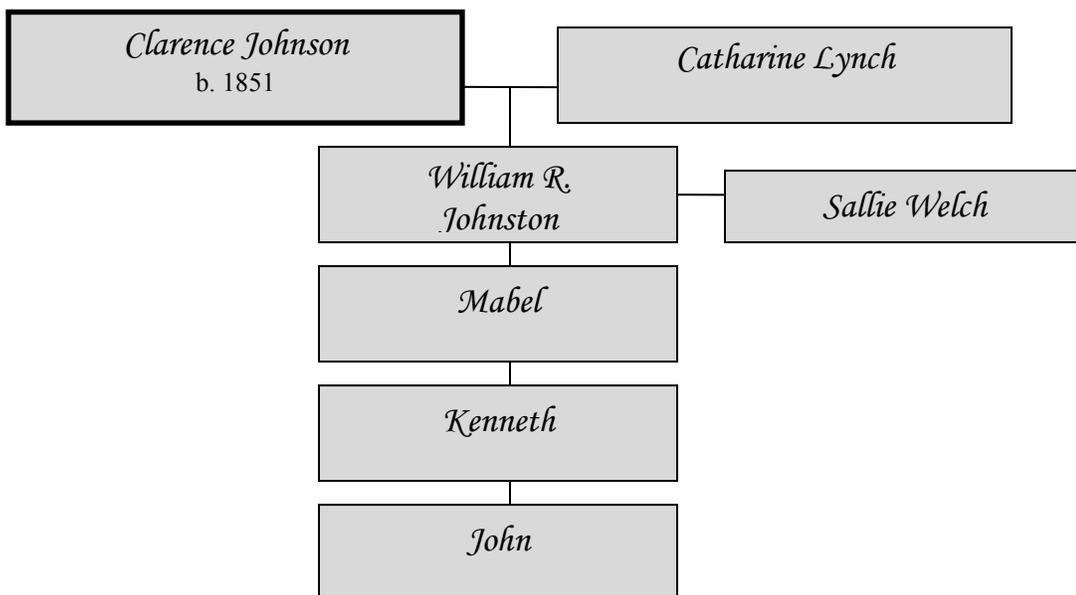
William Johnson, Jr. Family



Eugenia Johnson Family



Clarence Johnson Family



William Johnson House Timeline

- 1793** Spanish Crown granted Lot 4 in Square 2 to Dona Maria Gerludix Solibellas.
- 1796** Solibellas sold lot to George Overaker for \$150. Deed suggested the existence of a small house.
- 1806** George Overaker received U. S. patent to Lot 4 in Square 2.
- 1820** George's widow and Trustee sold lot to George's daughter Elizabeth, wife of Gabriel Tichenor.
- 1822** Gabriel Tichenor freed enslaved woman Harriet Battles and her daughter Ann Battles
- 1824** Tichenor rented house on lot to Mary White.
- 1829** Tichenor deeded a part of Lot 4 – 36' x 148' to Harriet Battles. Records suggest there was a house on the lot.
- 1835** William Johnson took over management of the property when he married Ann Battles. Records show he rented house and lower floor to McGetnick.
- 1836** A house was located on the lot by this date. William Johnson's diary noted that "Mrs. Battles commences to move out . . ." in anticipation of building a new house on the lot. Archeological evidence suggests it was a frame house.
- 1838** Battles moved into the new house constructed on the lot. On December 11 William Johnson recorded that he (and presumably his family) had moved into the house.
- 1839** A huge fire swept through Natchez destroying the house and separate kitchen building. At the time, the Johnson family was living on a rented plantation in the country in order to escape a yellow fever epidemic in town.
- 1840** Ronald McCallum started to rebuild on the adjoining lot. On May 7, 1840 one of the most devastating tornadoes in American History struck Natchez, damaging the McCallum house.
- Following the tornado, William Johnson began building his new house. He used brick from the Parker Hotel across the street, demolished in the tornado. Johnson records on May 21, that "I was to day very Buissy in Cleaning Brick in State Street."
- 1841** Records show that Johnson leased the first floor to Joseph Barbieri as a dancing school.
- 1897** The new brick kitchen was built.
- 1906** William R. Johnston, grandson of William T. Johnson, occupies the house with his family.
- 1939** The house was willed to Sallie Johnston by her husband William R. Johnston.
- 1975** Sallie Johnston willed the house to her nephew Spencer Griggs and her niece Mary Louise Miller whom she reared in the house.
- 1976** Heirs sold the house to the Preservation Society of Ellicott Hill.
- 1990** The house was sold to the City of Natchez which donated it and the McCallum house to the National Park Service.



Figure 14. The formal dedication and opening of the William Johnson House, on February 26, 2005 as part of the Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration. William Johnson's grandniece Mary Louise Miller (who was raised in the Johnson House) and her daughter Lois Hawthorne (who was born in the house) attended the historic event. Both are in the photograph, 5th and 6th from the left. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.



Figure 15. The William Johnson House exhibits include a touch-screen "digital diary" with narrated excerpts from Johnson's journals. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.



Figure 16. The site also includes tactile models of the site's three historic structures. Model includes audio and video narration. The William Johnson House received a National Accessibility Award in 2005 for its universally accessible exhibit design and fabrication. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.



Figure 17. William Johnson House exhibit. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.

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William Johnson Audio Diary

Includes Biographical Information and Excerpts from Johnson's Journals

Actors: Vanessa Anderson
David Bostick

Courtesy of Boutwell Studios, Birmingham Alabama
Southern Custom Exhibits, Inc. Anniston, Alabama

1 hour and 6 minutes of narrations

NOTE: Some of the diary tracks contain adult language and content. It is recommended that the instructor listen to the track first before deciding if it is appropriate for the class lesson.

- | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Track 1 - | March 29, 1851 (:35) | <i>Johnson talks business, and
"rascality"</i> |
| Track 2 - | "The Diary of William Johnson" (1:15) | |
| Track 3 - | "William Johnson's Natchez" (1:20) | |
| Track 4 - | "Born Into Slavery" (1:03) | |
| Track 5 - | "The Extended Family" (3:22) | |
|
 | | |
| Track 6 - | January 24, 1838 (:13) | <i>William Johnson, Jr.'s 2nd birthday</i> |
| Track 7 - | July 19, 1844 (:18) | <i>Johnson's infant son dies</i> |
| Track 8 - | November 23, 1837 (:15) | <i>Johnson argues with his mother</i> |
| Track 9 - | March 26, 1841 (:20) | <i>Little Richard breaks a picture</i> |
| Track 10 - | December 6, 1841 (:10) | <i>Richard is sick</i> |
| Track 11 - | January 2, 1845 (:16) | <i>Eugenia Johnson is born</i> |
| Track 12 - | August 13, 1842 (:29) | <i>Johnson quarrels with wife Ann</i> |
| Track 13 - | January 11, 1848 (1:03) | <i>Johnson's sister Adelia dies</i> |
| Track 14 - | January 13, 1848 (1:36) | <i>Johnson grieves and reflects</i> |
| Track 15 - | January 6, 1849 (1:05) | <i>Amy Johnson dies</i> |
|
 | | |
| Track 16 - | "The Barber and His Business" (2:52) | |
| Track 17 - | January 3, 1840 (1:09) | <i>Johnson surveys the property</i> |

- Track 18 – January 30, 1843 (1:06) *Johnson pays his taxes*
- Track 19 – October 17, 1837 (:16) *Business is bad in Natchez*
- Track 20 – February 14, 1837 (:28) *Johnson tells an amusing story*
- Track 21 – May 7, 1837 (:29) *Banks in Natchez are closing*
- Track 22 – November 3, 1841 (:21) *Johnson rents his house*
- Track 23 – August 3, 1846 (:45) *Johnson sells a horse*
- Track 24 – June 10, 1838 (:11) *Business is great*
- Track 25 - July 9, 1842 (1:02) *Johnson and his wife suffer segregation*
- Track 26 – December 15, 1836 (:35) *Johnson buys railroad stock*
- Track 27 – “Sportsman” (:44)
- Track 28 – August 25, 1842 (:45) *Johnson is “captain of the hunt”*
- Track 29 – December 14, 1840 (:31) *Johnson hunts with new gun*
- Track 30 - February 21, 1847 (:49) *Johnson sails boats with children*
- Track 31 - October 28, 1836 (:43) *Johnson “beats the crowd”*
- Track 32 - November 17, 1839 (:16) *Kills a “buster” of an alligator*
- Track 33 - November 11, 1836 (1:24) *Johnson enjoys a good dinner*
- Track 34 – “The Political Climate” (2:27)
- Track 35 – June 30, 1837 (:33) *Johnson’s political creed*
- Track 36 - November 7, 1836 (:37) *Judge Quitman gives a speech*
- Track 37 – August 20, 1840 (1:58) *Pomp and Nonsense*
- Track 38 - October 5, 1840 (:58) *The Whigs meet at the log cabin*
- Track 39 - November 2, 1840 (:53) *First day of election*
- Track 40 - November 3, 1840 (:16) *Someone steals “the Humbug Ball”*
- Track 41 – June 15, 1847 (:34) *Bingaman and Davis Speak*
- Track 42 - November 23, 1850 (:25) *General Foote talks secession*
- Track 43 - November 2, 1847 (:34) *Johnson bets on the election*
- Track 44 – “Talk of the Town”

- Track 45 – January 6, 1840 (1:09) *General Jackson visits Natchez*
- Track 46 - March 2, 1836 (:14) *A “Beautiful and Splendid Sight”*
- Track 47 – February 22, 1844 (:15) *The Fire Company Turns Out*
- Track 48 - March 16, 1843 (:39) *Snow in March*
- Track 49 - May 7 and 8, 1840 (:30) *Deadly Tornado*
- Track 50 – May 7, 1842 (:30) *Mob destroys balloon*
- Track 51 - May 12, 1847 (:26) *Baylor Winn’s daughter in chains*
- Track 52 - August 18, 1844 (:46) *Mr. Murcherson abuses slave*
- Track 53 - September 9, 1837 (:40) *Judge Quitman has a fight*
- Track 54 - July 22, 1837 (:38) *The Frenchmen behaves rascally*
- Track 55 - November 28, 1836 (2:43) *Bloody Work at Throckmorton’s corner*
- Track 56 – “The Enslaved” (3:28)
- Track 57 – June 18, 1839 (:24) *What puppies!*
- Track 58 – March 19, 1838 (1:01) *Steven runs away*
- Track 59 – May 14, 1841 (:40) *Johnson tries to sell Steven*
- Track 60 – June 16, 1841 (.11) *Johnson teaches Charles*
- Track 61 - July 24, 1837 (:29) *Walker runs away*
- Track 62 - March 22, 1838 (1:28) *Johnson places an ad for Walker*
- Track 63 - November 8, 1841 (:24) *Johnson punishes Lucinda*
- Track 64 – December 31, 1843 (:23) *A “Sad Day”*
- Track 65 – January 1, 1844 (:39) *Johnson sells Steven*
- Track 66 – “The Death of William Johnson” (:57)
- Track 67 – “Baylor Winn Walks Free” (1:11)
- Track 68 – “The Post War Era” (2:08)
- Track 69 – “Another Johnson Diarist” (5:54)
- Track 70 – “Treasures in the Attic” (:36)

Suggested Activities and Discussion Questions
Using the Audio CD

1. **Students can keep their own daily journal, recording business transactions, family news, recreational activities or even political views, and include sketches of what they write about. Discuss how their entries compare and contrast with those in William Johnson's diary.**
2. **Students can draft a timeline of Johnson's observations along side of significant events in Natchez history and United States history.**
3. **Students can discuss what kind of man Johnson was. What do we know about William Johnson? What things are left unanswered, and why? Did Johnson have any admirable qualities, as well as character flaws? What would you like to ask William Johnson if he were alive today?**

A. THE EXTENDED FAMILY (TRACKS 5 to 15)

1. **William Johnson's family was very large, and not all the family members are mentioned in his diary. Who are mentioned in these selected entries? What kind of family events are recorded? When you keep your own diary, what do you say about your own family?**
2. **Johnson records arguments that he had with his wife and his mother, although he sometimes omits details. Why would he omit details? Have you ever had an argument with a member of your family? What was the argument about? Would you write about it in your diary?**
3. **Johnson suffered the loss of three family members in a span of ten years. Who were they? Have you ever lost someone that was close to you? How did this loss make you feel?**

4. Using the “Extended Family” introduction, as well as other information on the CD and in the curriculum packet, construct a tree of William Johnson’s family.

B. THE BARBER AND HIS BUSINESS (TRACKS 16 to 26)

1. William Johnson’s business endeavors dominate his journals more than any other topic. From listening to these audio tracks what were the many ways that William Johnson earned money?
2. In Track 18 (January 30, 1843), William Johnson writes about taxes and how he hates them. Listen to this track and read the tax receipt in this guide. What were the things that William Johnson paid taxes on? Are we still taxed on these items today?
3. Occasionally Johnson writes about something funny that happened at work. What are some of the funny things that happened at school that you might write about in your diary?

C) SPORTSMAN (TRACKS 27 to 33)

1. William Johnson was very competitive when it came to his favorite sport – hunting. He records his hunting performance, along with those of his friends, in great detail, and boasts when he is “Captain of the Hunt.” What games do you play with your friends? Do you keep score in your diary? How do you feel when you perform well?
2. In Track 33, Johnson tells us about a “tolerable fine dinner” that he enjoyed with his friends. Have you ever enjoyed a fine meal with your friends and family that you would like to record in your diary?

D) THE POLITICAL CLIMATE (TRACKS 34 to 43)

- 1. The political campaigns during William Johnson's time were very spirited and exciting. This era is considered the beginning of modern campaigning, when candidates and their supporters toured the country and appealed to the common citizen for their vote. How does the campaigning compare/contrast with elections today? What strategies and media do politicians use to appeal to voters today that were not available to the candidates of Johnson's time?**
- 2. William Johnson dismissed the "tumble-bug ball" as "splendid foolishness." What gimmicks do candidates use today to promote themselves? Are they successful, or would you dismiss their efforts as "pomp and nonsense?"**
- 3. As a free black man in Mississippi prior to the Civil War, Johnson had few political rights. He could not vote, for example. Who were the other groups of people who were denied voting rights? If Johnson could not vote, what were other ways for him to take part in the excitement of campaigns and elections?**
- 4. William Johnson wrote down Vice-President Richard Johnson's political creed in his diary. Knowing what we know about Johnson, why did he copy it? What does this creed tell us about Johnson's values and his hopes for the future?**

E) TALK OF THE TOWN (TRACKS 44 to 55)

- 1. Johnson liked to record all the town news in detail. Sometimes the news was good, such as the visit of President Andrew Jackson to Natchez. There was much bad news as well,**

- particularly when a tornado or sickness struck the city. What kind of news is happening in your hometown that is worth writing about?
2. In Track 46 (March 2, 1846) Johnson describes a balloon in flight as “the most beautiful and splendid sight” he ever saw. Have you ever witnessed something so beautiful and impressive that you would like to write it down for posterity?
 3. Johnson writes a great deal about fights, brawls and even murders that occurred in Natchez. What do his writings tell us about daily life in Natchez, Mississippi?

F) THE ENSLAVED (TRACKS 56 to 65)

1. In track 60 (June 16, 1841), Johnson teaches Charles a lesson in “ciphering”. What is “ciphering”, and why do you think Johnson taught Charles this skill?
2. Many of Johnson’s slaves ran away, including a man named Walker. Listen to the advertisement Johnson wrote and published about Walker (Track 62, March 22, 1838). How does it compare with other runaway slave ads? Where may Walker have gone? Why did Johnson want Walker returned?
3. Johnson owned an enslaved man named Steven who got into a heap of trouble. What did Steven do that angered Johnson? Why would Johnson punish Steven? Do you think Johnson liked or disliked Steven and why?



Figure 18. Sketch from William Johnson's diary of Steven pulling a cart. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

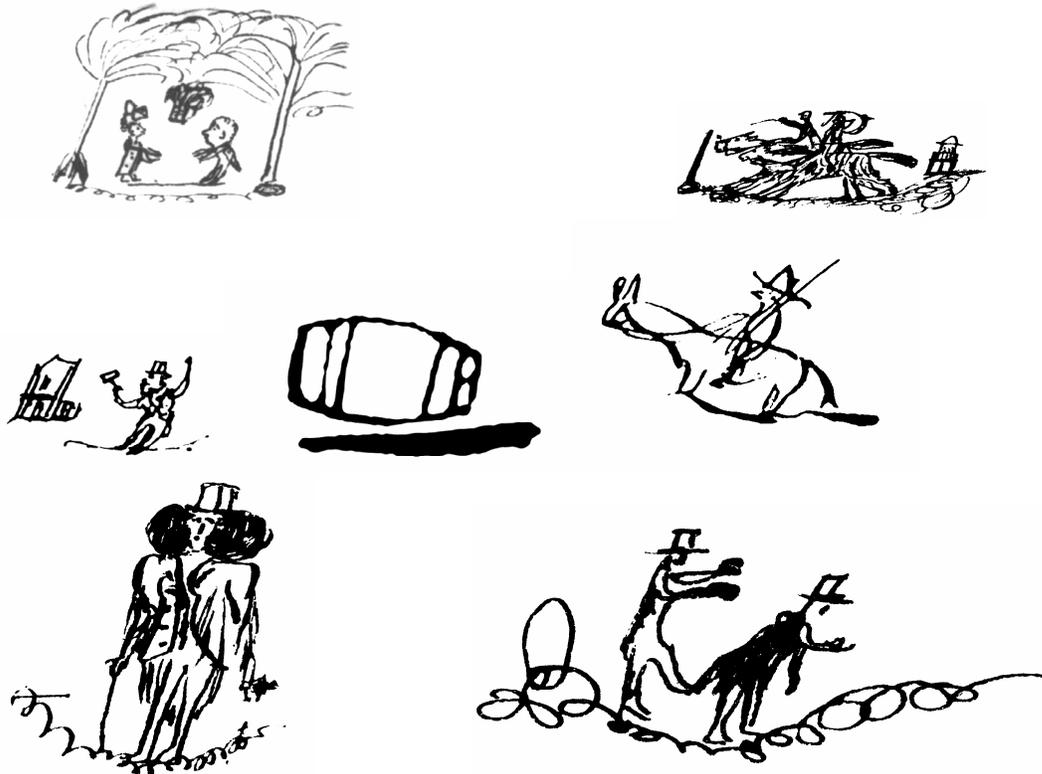


Figure 19. More sketches that adorned William Johnson's diaries. Courtesy of the William T. Johnson Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Lesson Plan

A Closer Look at the Johnson Family Using Maps and Timelines

Location: Classroom

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Additional Materials Needed: A United States Map

Curricular Connections

2004 Mississippi Social Studies Framework

Grades 3 and 4, Competency #3- Demonstrate the ability to use social studies tools.

Grade 5, Competency #3- Analyze spatial and ecological relationships between people, places and environments utilizing social studies tools.

Language Arts

Grades 3-5, Competency #2- The student will apply strategies and skills to comprehend, respond to, interpret, or evaluate a variety of texts of increasing lengths, difficulty, and complexity.

Objectives

-The students will be able to identify five geographic locations relative to the life of William Johnson and his family.

-The students will be able to identify important dates in the life of William Johnson and his family.

Suggested Procedure

1. Teacher should read the short biography of William Johnson from the “Between Two Worlds: The Life of Free Black Diarist William T. Johnson” Curriculum Guide.
2. Teacher will then read aloud with the students the short synopsis of the life of William Johnson included on page 45 in the lesson plan (teacher can also ask the students to read this on their own).
3. After reading the short biography the teacher will ask the students to re-read the document,. During the second reading they will be asked to circle any mention of a **date** or a **place**.

Example: In **1814** William Johnson’s mother Amy was freed in **Vidalia, Louisiana**.

4. Students will then fill in the dates and corresponding events on the timeline provided.
5. Students will then fill in the geographic locations on the blank map provided, and then describe what event relevant to the Johnson family occurred at that location (A United States Map with states and cities will be needed to complete this exercise).

Evaluation

Upon completion of the activity the teacher can go over the correct answers with the students.

A Short Biography of William Johnson

William Johnson was born as a slave in 1809. His mother Amy and sister Adelia were also slaves. In 1814, his mother Amy was given her freedom in Vidalia, Louisiana. Four years later his sister Adelia was freed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. William Johnson was finally freed in 1820 when he was 11 years old. The Johnsons were a fortunate family. Most slaves were not freed until 1863 when Abraham Lincoln released the Emancipation Proclamation.

The same year that William was “manumitted”, or freed, his sister married a man named James Miller. James and William became close friends. James was a successful barber. As a young man, William trained to be a barber by learning from James. In 1828, William was ready to go out on his own, and he bought a barbershop in Port Gibson, Mississippi.

In 1830, William bought a barbershop from James that was on Main St. in Natchez, Mississippi. William was a wise businessperson. In 1834, he decided to open a bathhouse. A bathhouse was a place where people could relax and enjoy a hot bath. Since there was no indoor plumbing in 1834, most people were not able to take baths at home.

In 1835, William settled down and married. He married a girl named Ann Battles who was also a former slave. William and Ann would eventually have 11 children!

Tragedy would come to the Johnson family in 1848 when William’s sister Adelia died in New Orleans, Louisiana. She was living there with James and their family. A year later William’s mother Amy also died.

The end for William would come in 1851. William owned a plantation called Hard Scrabble. William’s plantation was right next to property owned by a man named Baylor Winn. William and Baylor Winn could not agree where Williams’s property ended and Baylor’s began. Baylor Winn became so angry over this dispute that in 1851 he murdered

William. The Johnson family and the community of Natchez were greatly saddened by William's death.

The story of William Johnson does not end in 1851. Throughout his life, William kept a diary. He wrote about his life, family and barbershops. In 1951, one hundred years after his death, the diary of William Johnson was published for all to read. His life and the things that he wrote about Natchez fascinated people.

In 1990, the Johnson family home on State Street in Natchez was donated to the National Park Service. It took the Park Service fifteen years to fix up the building before it opened. In 2005, the William Johnson House had its grand opening. Today, thousands of visitors visit the house, learn about his life, and read his diary.

The Johnson Family Timeline

Directions- After reading the Short Biography of William Johnson fill in the correct dates and events on the timeline below.

1809 - _____

1814 - _____

____ - William's sister Adelia is freed from slavery.

1820 - _____

____ - Adelia marries James Miller.

1828 - _____

____ - William buys a barbershop on Main Street in Natchez.

1834 - _____

1835 - _____

____ - Adelia dies in New Orleans Louisiana.

1849 - _____

1851 - _____

____ - Abraham Lincoln releases the Emancipation Proclamation

____ - William Johnson's diary is published.

1990 - _____

2005 - _____

TIMELINE ANSWER KEY

- 1809 - William Johnson is born.
- 1814 - William Johnson's mother Amy is set free from slavery.
- 1818 - William's sister Adelia is freed from slavery.
- 1820 - William Johnson is freed from slavery.
- 1820 - Adelia marries James Miller.
- 1828 - William buys a barbershop in Port Gibson, Mississippi.
- 1830 - William buys a barbershop on Main Street in Natchez.
- 1834 - William opens a bathhouse.
- 1835 - William marries Ann Battles.
- 1848 - Adelia dies in New Orleans, Louisiana.
- 1849 - William's mother Amy dies.
- 1851 - William is murdered by Baylor Winn.
- 1863 - Abraham Lincoln releases the Emancipation Proclamation.
- 1951 - William Johnson's diary is published.
- 1990 - The William Johnson House is donated to the National Park Service.
- 2005 - The William Johnson House opens to the public.

Map Activity

Directions - After reading the Short Biography of William Johnson, label the following cities on the map below:

Natchez

New Orleans

Philadelphia

Vidalia

Port Gibson



Continue on the next page

After you label the cities on the map, describe why that city was important in the life of William Johnson or one of his family members.

Natchez-

Vidalia-

Port Gibson-

New Orleans-

Philadelphia-

MAP ANSWER KEY



MAP ANSWER KEY (Continued)

Natchez - hometown of William Johnson and also the location of his barbershops.

Vidalia - town where William Johnson's mother Amy was freed from slavery.

Port Gibson - the location of William Johnson's first barbershop.

New Orleans - the home of William Johnson's sister, Adelia and her family.

Philadelphia - the location where Johnson's sister Adelia was set free from slavery.

William Johnson Math Exercise

William Johnson's diary is full of details that help us understand his lifestyle. The following math questions are based on some of William Johnson's actual journal entries. Feel free to use these examples or you can create your own problems that best suit your curricular needs.

1. 1836 February 17, "I sold Capt. Nevit five work horses and a mule- their names are as follows and prices."

Big Bay Horse, Fiddler \$80
Black Horse, Black Hawk \$35
Black Horse, Gelespie _____
Old Ball _____
Grey Horse, John \$50
Little Dan, the Mule \$40

Question- If William Johnson made \$265 from the sale of these animals, then how much did he get for Gelespie and Old Ball, if Gelespie sold for \$10 more than Old Ball?

2. 1836 May 6, "I paid Mr. Baker \$58.27 for City Tax. I thought it very strange for my tax last year was only 17.50."

Question - How much more did William Johnson pay in taxes in 1836 than in the previous year?

3. 1836 July 29, "I bought four barrels of flour today at \$4.12 a barrel, also six pair of pantaloons at \$2.50 per pair."

Questions -

What was the total amount William Johnson paid for the flour? _____

What was the total amount he paid for the pantaloons? _____

What was the total amount he paid for both of these items? _____

4. 1836 November 11 - On this day William Johnson went hunting with some friends. In his diary he recorded the animals that were killed and who killed them.

"McCary got 1 duck, 1 squirrel, 1 wood cock, 1 king fisher, and 1 pelican. Mr. Minet killed 1 duck and wounded a brant, so he told me- and I killed 6 ducks, 1 squirrel, 1 loon, 1 wood cock, and 1 king fisher. Mr. Hanchet got 3 ducks and 1 squirrel. Mr. Harrison got 2 ducks and 1 squirrel."

Questions -

How many ducks were killed by all the men?

Who killed the most ducks?

Who killed 5 animals, without killing more than one of each type of animal?

5. 1836 December 31, "Dr. Hogg paid me today \$21 for seven months shaving and hair cutting."

Question- If Dr. Hogg paid the same amount each month, how much did he pay per month? _____

6. 1837 February 17, "I bought 2,000 cigars at \$14.50 per thousand."

Question - What was the total price that William Johnson paid for the 2,000 cigars? _____

7. 1837 March 30, "I went to the Auction Store of Sprague and Howell and bought 98 yards of Curtain Calico at 15 cents per yard and 44 yards of Diaper at 21 cents per yard and 11 pair of stockings, 25 cents per pair."

Question - What was the total price that William Johnson paid for the stockings? _____

8. 1837 April 17, "I went under the Hill this morning and bought thirty five barrels of corn at \$1.25 per barrel....I also bought 102 pounds of bacon at 10 cents per pound and one barrel of flower at \$8. . . ."

Question - If William Johnson paid 10 cents for one pound of bacon, how much did he pay for 102 pounds of bacon? _____

9. 1837 June 1, William Johnson went fishing on this day at Lake Concordia. He said the he caught "ten dozen and four fish."

Question - How many total fish did William Johnson catch? _____

10. 1837 July 21, "Mrs. Battles paid me two dollars that I loaned her a week ago. . . ."

Question - Since it took Mrs. Battle one week to repay William Johnson the \$2, what was the date the William Johnson lent her the money? _____

11. 1839 October 1, "I took Winston and John and my gun and went into the swamp to hunt. I killed 1 owl, 3 sap suckers and 6 squirrels. Winston only 1 sap sucker, and 1 yellow Hamer. Mr. Paine killed 15 squirrels and Mr. D. Barlow 4 squirrels. . . ."

Questions -

How many squirrels did William Johnson and his friends kill? _____

How many total animals did William Johnson and his friends kill? _____

12. 1841 November 12 - Even though William Johnson was not allowed to vote he paid close attention to election results. On this day he wrote down the results of a local election.

“Colonel Bingaman’s vote in 26 counties is 10229, Dr. Gwin’s vote in the same 26 counties is 10104.”

Question - How many more votes did Colonel Bingaman get? _____

13. 1843 January 30 - William Johnson had to pay taxes on his property and slaves. On this date he recorded the amount of taxes paid by himself, his mother Amy Johnson, and his mother-in-law Harriet Battles.

William Johnson

One town lot and 2 houses \$5,000

Five slaves \$1,500

Amy Johnson

Five slaves \$800

Harriet Battles

One house and one lot \$1,900

Two slaves \$300

Questions -

If William Johnson paid the same amount of taxes on each of his five slaves, how much would that amount be? _____

If Amy Johnson paid the same amount of taxes on each of her five slaves, how much would that amount be? _____

If Harriet Battles paid the same amount of taxes on her two slaves, how much would that amount be? _____

14. 1843 November 21 - On this day William Johnson saw a man named Mr. S. S. Prentiss give a political speech.

“ He spoke from ½ past 7 until ½ past 10 o’clock. . . .”

Question - For how many minutes did the speech last? _____

15. 1843 December 21 - William Johnson was a big fan of horse racing. On this day he wrote about a horse race in New Orleans.

“I heard from the mile race in New Orleans this morning, and Ruffin won the race easy, the time of the first heat was won in 2 minutes, the second in 2:19 seconds.”

Question- How many total seconds did it take for the horse to win the second race? _____

16. 1844 February 7 - William Johnson owned a slave named Steven. Sometimes he would rent out Steven to work for other people. On this day William Johnson wrote about one of those times.

“Mr. S. Stutson paid me today \$36, \$12 was for his years shaving and \$24 was for the hire of Steven for two months.”

Question- If Mr. Stutson paid the same amount per month for the two months that he hired Steven, how much did he pay for each month? _____

17. 1844 February 20, *“I was up to Esdra sale to day and bought 47 volumes of Buffins Natural History, and gave 28 cents for each volume, making in all \$_____”*

Question - What was the total price that William Johnson paid for *Buffins Natural History*? _____

18. 1844 April 29, *“I loaned Mr. Gregory fifteen dollars today to be paid in three weeks.”*

Question - If Mr. Gregory gives William Johnson the same amount of money for each of the three weeks, how much will Mr. Gregory pay each week in order to pay back the full \$15? _____

19. 1844 June 8, *“I paid Mr. Tainter today \$13.80 for 6 dozen packs of cards that I got from him some time ago. . . .”*

Question - If there are 52 cards in 1 deck then how many cards are in 6 dozen decks? _____

20. 1844 November 28, *“I saw a race today between the quarter horse Bull and another horse...The horse bull gave 17 ½ feet to the other horse and beat him by 21ft.”*

Question - If the horse named Bull gave the other horse a 17 ½ foot head start how many feet would Bull have to run until he was 21 feet in front of the other horse, if the other horse was standing still? _____

MATH EXERCISE ANSWER KEY

1. Gelespie \$35, Old Ball \$25
2. \$40.77
3. \$16.48 for the flour, \$15.00 for the pantaloons, \$31.48 total
4. 13, William Johnson, McCary
5. 3
6. \$29.00
7. \$2.75
8. \$10.20
9. 124
10. July 14, 1837
11. 25, 31
12. 125
13. \$300, \$160, \$150
14. 180 minutes
15. 139
16. 12
17. 13.16
18. 5
19. 3744
20. 38.5 feet

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: a person in favor of ending various laws or customs (i.e., slavery)

Acquitted: to clear a person of a charge

American Colonization Society: a group organized during the antebellum period to assist in the removal/settlement of Free People of Color and slaves to the newly formed African country of Liberia

Antebellum: the period of American history before the Civil War, roughly 1800 to 1860

Apprentice: a person learning a trade, craft or skill

Assassination: to murder by surprise attack

Calcimine: white or colored liquid of whiting or zinc white, glue and water used as a wash for plastered surfaces

Chattel: an item of personal property; an antebellum reference to a slave as “chattel”

Ciphering: to add, compute or estimate

Cistern: a large receptacle for storing rainwater usually underground

Civil rights: the idea of equal treatment of all people with respect to life, liberty, property and the protection of law

Conscripted: to forcibly enroll someone into the armed services

Contradiction: a condition in which things tend to be opposite or inconsistent with the other

Dependency: an antebellum structure that usually housed slaves and was located behind the master’s house

Diary: a daily written record of the writer’s experiences

Emancipation: to release from bondage or servitude

Freedom papers: certificates carried by Free People of Color to authenticate their status

Hack: a carriage or coach for hire

Indentures: a contract binding a person to work for another for a given length of time

Insurrection: a rising up against authority

Inquisition: the act of inquiring or investigating; an event described by Johnson in the 1830s and 40s when white citizens forcibly removed free blacks who could not produce freedom papers

Manumission: – the legal act of freeing an enslaved person, to free, to emancipate

Manuscript: a book or document written by hand

Mulatto: a person who has African and Caucasian ancestry

Nabob: a very rich or important man; usually used when describing white plantation Owners

Nouveau riche: a person who has only recently become wealthy

Oil cloth: a cloth made waterproof by painting over with oil paint; used to cover floors

Overseer: one who watches over and directs the work of others

Paternalism: a system of governing or controlling a group much like a father controls his Children

Penmanship: handwriting as an art or skill

Petition: a formal document addressed to a person or group containing a request

Pillory: a device consisting of a wooden board with holes for the head and hand; used as a means of punishment

Plantation: an area that grows crops cultivated by workers living on it

Privy: a toilet; an outhouse

Rascality: – to act like a villain, wickedness, dishonesty

Restoration: Repairing something back to normal condition

Tester: a canopy over a bed

Vigilance Committee: the group involved in organizing the “Inquisition”

Whigs: an antebellum political party that protected industry and wanted to limit the power of the Executive branch of government

William's Word Search

Find the vocabulary words below that are hidden in the puzzle. Look up any words you are unfamiliar with in the dictionary. Write a sentence or short paragraph explaining how each of the words are connected with the William Johnson House.

I O A I Y L F L Y N S E H V M
Y P U N A R O O O Q M R A P U
V U P I T T E I D A U E I K L
S K R I T E T T N J B D R F L
Y T I A S A B C E U C R C P A
B L L T T S I E S M G U U O C
U U I N C P I I L P E M T H C
M B A M A H N S H L B C S S M
Y L T T A E E F S O U A V R J
P C I S S F H N I I X M R E O
Q O X S L A V E R Y M T U B H
N P N O I S S I M U N A M R N
D D E P E N D E N C Y X B A S
X F W T D Y R A U T I B O B O
Z E H C T A N V R R O G M F N

ANTEBELLUM

BARBERSHOP

BUSINESS

CEMETERY

DEPENDENCY

EMANCIPATION

FAMILY

HAIRCUTS

JOHNSON

KITCHEN

MANUMISSION

MC CALLUM

MISSISSIPPI

MULATTO

MURDER

NATCHEZ

OBITUARY

PLANTATION

SLAVERY

TRIAL

Population of Free People of Color in Mississippi

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mississippi</u>	<u>Adams County</u>	<u>Natchez</u>
1820	458	118	NA
1830	518	135	75
1840	1,336	283	207
1850	930	258	213
1860	773	225	208

The essential benefits of freedom for African Americans in Natchez were spelled out in state and municipal law. Free blacks were severely restricted in their actions by a variety of statutes placed into law from 1822 to 1860.

By law in the 1840s, free persons of color in Natchez COULD NOT:

- **Vote or hold public office**
- **Sell grocery items, liquor or other goods outside of an incorporated town**
- **Operate or work in a house of entertainment or a printing establishment**
- **Serve in the militia**
- **Testify against a white person in a criminal court of law**
- **Insult or strike a white person**
- **Assemble on the Sabbath with other free blacks or enslaved blacks to hear sermons other than those conducted by a licensed white preacher**
- **Function as a minister under penalty of thirty-nine lashes**

By law in the 1840s, free persons of color in Natchez COULD:

- **Own property, including slaves**
- **Learn to read and write (although no schools in Natchez existed for them)**
- **Legally marry**
- **Bequeath property to their children, protect property, collect debts and enforce contracts**
- **Travel as long as freedom papers were carried with them**
- **Carry a weapon and hunt (made illegal in 1854)**



Pictured above: Junior Ranger History Camp participants enjoying the "Unearthing the Truth: Investigating William Johnson" activity at the William Johnson House. Courtesy of Natchez National Historical Park.

Natchez National Historical Park presents FREE education programs to elementary and high school students by appointment at the William Johnson House.

A special 2 hour interactive educational program “Unearthing the Truth: Investigating William Johnson” is offered throughout the school year for classes of around 20 students. In this program, students are split into teams of architects, archaeologists, historians and detectives (complete with costumes and props), and learn about William Johnson through reading primary source documents, participating in a mock archaeological dig, “interrogating” rangers, and other engaging activities.

To learn more about “Unearthing the Truth: Investigating William Johnson” and other special programs, please call Natchez National Historical Park at 601-446-5790 for more information. Information is also available on our web site at www.nps.gov/natc.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN



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www.aaexperience.org

