

CHAPTER NINE

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Driving west on U.S. 460 past Ward Hall a set of new schools are on the right. Polly Hawkins Craig was said to have been buried in a family graveyard off a lane that seems to have disappeared when those schools were built. Hers was the only tombstone still standing when it was written about. Her tombstone supposedly said "Mother of many faithful children." She had twelve children and was the mother of the preaching Craig boys.

Alongside U.S. 460 and in front of the parking lot of a school is a new historical sign that tells of Jemima Sugget Johnson. This wonderful woman was the mother of eleven children, five of whom the sign says are buried in the Great Crossing Cemetery. She and Robert's children were:

- 1) Betsy Johnson Payne whose story has been told earlier.
- 2) James Johnson who was Kentucky's leading promoter, owner, and developer of shipping, stagecoach, and rail lines, becoming one of the wealthiest men of his day. He led an attack at the Battle of Thames and became a U.S. Congressman.
- 3) William Johnson operated the family mills, producing flour, lumber, paper and gunpowder. He died from an illness contracted while serving in the War of 1812 as a colonel. His children included George W. Johnson, Confederate Governor of Kentucky.
- 4) Sallie Johnson married General William Ward, who became Indian agent in Mississippi. Their children included Junius Ward, owner of ward Hall.
- 5) Richard Mentor Johnson who will be told about shortly.
- 6) Benjamin Johnson was appointed by President Monroe to the Arkansas Supreme Court. Later three presidents designated him a federal district judge.
- 7) Robert Johnson who died in August 1812 while serving in the War of 1812.
- 8) John Telemachus Johnson was an aide to General Harrison in the War of 1812, a state and then federal congressman and later a minister of the Reformed Baptist movement. He led the movement to unite the Alexander Campbell movement with the Christian Churches led by Barton Warren Stone.
- 9) Joel Johnson moved to Arkansas where he became the largest landowner. His son Lycurgus built Lakeport, now the only surviving antebellum mansion on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi Delta.
- 10) George W. Johnson died at the age of eighteen in 1810.
- 11) Henry Johnson became the wealthiest member of the family. He fought under his older brother James in the War of 1812.

Jemima and Robert must have been very proud of their children.

In 1785 the Great Crossing Baptist Church was established. William Hickman and Elijah Craig preached at this church. Both of these preachers were 'Foot Washing Baptists.' For many years Kentucky's Baptists observed the ordinance of the washing of each other's feet. Elijah Craig was pastor of the church until he irritated too many of the congregation and he was urged to leave.

Many years after the establishment of the church Henry V. Johnson wrote "My mother was a devoted member of the Baptist demonization, and attended Great Crossing Church. It was a rectangular building with two entrances, one for the ladies and one for the men and boys, for in that day, the sexes were not allowed to set together. On Sunday morning, the big carriage was brought out, and two white horses, 'Old Jack' and 'Old John' were hitched up with an array of fine harness, and Matt in his black suit with one of my father's old silk hats adorning his head, would drive my mother and some of the children to the church in time for the nine o'clock Sunday School."

"At ten o'clock old Brother Black would begin his sermon; for two hours or more he would orate, and as sat there listening to his vivid and lengthy descriptions of hellfire and the torment of the lost, in my fancy, I could almost see his satanic majesty with his cloven foot and forked tail turning the victims over the red hot gridiron. After the preaching there would always be a great handshaking, while the two long meter hymns were slowly lined out and sung by brother Branaham and his assistants. That over, everybody would file out of the church onto the lawn where would be for some time of visiting and then go home with some of the church friends- like Aunt Sallie Martin- who delighted in hospitality, and who in my youthful mind, was an expert in the rapidity with which she could cut and distribute a pie, or a twelve cut watermelon."

Today there is a public park bordering the Elkhorn just below where the Great Crossing Church now sits. A small clear stream still flows from the old spring just as you enter the park. A paved path runs along the Elkhorn up to a spring surrounded by a lovely stone dry-laid wall. You can sit there as the spring gurgles out of a small cliff and watch the many song birds flutter back and forth. There is a boat launching site there and I have taken grandchildren and other children there to canoe. Children love spotting birds, coons and even otters along the creek

Once, the Johnson home sat near the church. Richard Johnson fell in love prior to 1812 with a poor white girl who labored as a seamstress. Legend says that Richard's proud mother objected to receiving into the family a woman who was not recognized by the finer circles of the section. Richard gave in to his mother's refusal to accept the poor woman into the family and ended his relationship with the seamstress. However he was said to have told his mother she would regret her interference in his love for the poor woman.

As early as 1787 Robert Johnson owned 16 slaves and the number he owned increased as the years went on. Slaves and slavery would play a huge part in the development of Scott County which became wealthy on the sweat and labor of the hardworking Blacks who worked on the farms and in the mills. Julia Chinn was a slave that would loom large in Richard's life. Tradition says that Richard's mother Jemima raised the household slave Julia in the main Johnson home and Julia had all the advantages in education, upbringing and clothes as did any young white girl brought up in the Johnson home.

The pioneer John Wilson told "Col. Dick's black wife was named Julia Chinn, had a brother Daniel Chinn. It was said he was secretly married to this black woman by the Rev. Thomas Henderson." At that time it was against the law in all states for any white man or woman to marry any black woman or man. However there were countless cases where white men took black mistresses. In his autobiography Benjamin Franklin advised young men to take a black woman as a mistresses; Franklin had two in his young manhood. If Richard had just maintained Julia as a mistress he would have received little censure. Instead Julia lived in his home and became, "the manager of the domestic concerns of the house." They had two daughters.

Just how "Black" was Julia? There is no picture of her. Richard's political foes hired Duff Green to write propaganda to influence the voters and he described Julia as being "a jet black, thick-lipped, odiferous wench."

In fact the last ancestor of Julia's that was black was her great-grandmother. Julia would have been little or no darker than many of the white women along the Elkhorn.

The first home of Richard and Julia was north of the Great Crossing at the deep, thought to be bottomless, blue hole of water, John Wilson had told about. His brick home "Blue Spring" became noted for the entertainments he held there. All politicians of the time hosted barbeques and other events in which they gave speeches seeking to gain votes. Johnson was described as having a military bearing and was "burly, genial, very good looking---with a jovial face and wandering, curly light auburn hair." John Orlando Scott recalled listening as Richard spoke to a crowd describing the Battle of the Thames. He said Richard's oratory was "of a conversational kind. He could weep with one eye and laugh with the other."

The ex-President James Monroe and the famed Revolutionary General Lafayette, who was conducting a tour of the United States, were hosted at Blue Springs. Ebenezer Stedman, bad grammar, punctuation and spelling told of Lafayette's coming:

"I recollect Sam & My self we were fishing under a big oak tree one Evening on the other side of Elkhorn In sight of the Georgetown & Frankfort (Road) we were pulling fish out fast when we heard the Stage from Frankfort Coming , I tell you the Stage Coach, was looked upon at that time with more interest that the Rail Road Car is at present."

"Every few miles he the Driver would blow his Bugle & some of the drivers could blow them fine. They had more Pride in Fine Coaches & Fine teams than the carriers do Now a day. As he comes Down the road from Capt. Craig's to Elkhorn he played Washington's march, & then he Stopt in Front of a Store kept there he told the news that General Lafayette arrived in Frankfort."

"Here I must tell you that the news of his arrival at Frankfort had such effect on Sam & Me that we quit fishing and went to the Mill to carry the news."

The General had gone first to Lexington and then came to Georgetown. Stedman told, "The road from Georgetown to Lexington was lined all the way with people from all parts of the State. You recollect where the present Cemetery Gate is on the hill at geotown, on Both sides of the Road then there was a Strong Staked Rider worm fence & I was opposite the gate, on top the fence when General Lafayette Came along, he was in an open Baruce, with his hat off(f) bowing to Each Side of the road & from there to geotown was one Live Mass of men women & Children Negroes & horses & Such Shouts with the roar of Cannon & Musketry, the Like no one will ever witness again."

Lafayette would stop and eat lunch at a hotel in town. A custom of the time had every important personage greeted with a bevy of young maidens dressed in white. One of the young maidens would present a bouquet of flowers to the honored guest and another would recite a poem she had written. Being a Frenchman Lafayette was known to have kissed some of these maidens. In Virginia he had kissed seven girls, one of whom, Lucy hanks, became Abraham Lincoln's grandmother. Lafayette dined with fifty girls in Georgetown and each of them sought to get the plate Lafayette dined off of as a memento. The twelve year old girl who received the plate would become Stedman's wife.

Having heard that Richard Johnson had killed Tecumseh Lafayette asked to visit at Johnson's home. Stedman was there and told, "there was a Great Ball in Honner of the occasion. I well Recollect of going with the Imence Croud of People to the Blew Spring, the residence of Richard M. Johnson. Such a gathering of people. He had a cannon at the Spring and Commenced firing Long before we reached there."

The man firing the cannon was John Linsey, 'a man of many parts'. He built the first stagecoach in Lexington "A coach so fine it was given the name of 'Rockaway'."

Local legend says the cannon fired was The Burgoyne Cannon. This cannon had been designed for the British Army as a highly portable infantry-support weapon. American forces had captured the cannon at the Battle of Saratoga during the Revolution. Since the British commander was General Burgoyne the cannon was given his name. In the war of 1812 the cannon was captured by the British when the American General Hull cowardly surrendered Detroit. Richard Johnson had supposedly recaptured it at the Battle of Thames in 1813. The cannon was later taken to Frankfort and used as the Kentucky official salute cannon.

The Ball at Blue Spring was said to have had a 500 pound cheese served up. At any rate Stedman said, "Every thing that was necessary for the occasion was prepared in fine order. Johnson's Two Daughters they played on the piano fine. They were dressed as fine as money could Dress then & to one that Did Not no they were as white as any of the Lydies there & there were a good many---He unblushingly treated the girls as his daughters placing them at the same table with the most honorable of white guests."

