

Finding Aid to the Martin N. Johnson Family Photograph Collection

Johnson, Martin N., 1850-1909

Martin N. Johnson family photograph collection, 1860s-1927

128 photographic prints

Collection number: Photo Mss 85

OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the [Martin N. Johnson Family Papers](#)
View collection in [Digital Horizons](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Ina and Virna Johnson, 1953-1954 (Acc 85).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection remain with the creators or images are in the public domain.

Citation: Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

BIOGRAPHY

Martin Nelson Johnson was born March 3, 1850 at Norway, Wisconsin, son of Nelson and Anna (Selheim) Johnson who were Norwegian immigrants. Nelson Johnson was an ordained minister of the Methodist Church. Shortly thereafter the family moved to near Decorah, Iowa where Martin graduated in 1873. He spent several years in California teaching, returning to his home in 1875. He was elected that year to the Iowa legislature, studied law at the University of Iowa from which he graduated in 1876, and was a presidential elector for the Hayes-Wheeler ticket. Mr. Johnson established a law office with his brother Lewis in Decorah and was elected state senator

in 1877. On June, 18, 1879 he married Stella White who was born at Westford, Connecticut on July 20, 1858. She was the daughter of Amos and Amanda (Jepson) White of Galesburg, Illinois.

In 1883 the Martin Johnson family, together with his brother Lewis, homesteaded in Dakota Territory near the present site of Petersburg, North Dakota. In 1886 he served as Nelson County District Attorney and in 1889 was a member of the N.D. Constitutional Convention at Bismarck. From 1890 to 1899 Mr. Johnson served as North Dakota's representative to Congress. In 1899 he ran for the United States Senate but lost. He then returned to engage in farming at Petersburg. In 1908 he was elected to the U.S. Senate in which office he died on October 21, 1909 in Fargo. He was buried in the Petersburg Cemetery. Mrs. Johnson died September 5, 1925. They had four children, Edith, Nellie, Ralph, and Florence.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Martin N. Johnson Family Photograph Collection consists of family photographs of Senator and Mrs. Johnson's extended families. The photographs were acquired as part of a collection of papers donated to the Institute by Virna Johnson. The manuscript collection has been processed as Institute collection 85. The printing processes and formats include a few tintype, numerous albumen prints, cartes-de-visite, cabinet photographs, photographic postcards plus a stereograph, three cyanotypes, and several developing-out paper prints. The collection dates from the 1860s to 1927. The collection has been organized into four series: Martin N. Johnson Family, Nelson and Anna Johnson Family, White/Jepson/ Houghton Families, and Virna Johnson.

The [Martin N. Johnson Family Series](#) includes six portraits of an adult Martin N. Johnson at various ages. The Petersburg, N.D. farmstead file includes prints of the house and farm buildings, a family picnic scene, and a group of people with two buggies in background and the foreground showing a vegetable garden. The Celebration photographs, honoring the new U.S. Senator Martin N. Johnson and wife Stella, was held on November 5, 1908 in Petersburg, N.D. Instead of horses, local citizens pulled the carriage in which U.S. Senator Johnson and wife Stella rode. The carriage was pulled by the people from the train station to downtown Petersburg. Local school children were included in the procession from the train station into town. United States flags were placed on the carriage and held by many people. The gravestones show photographs of the Johnson gravestone, including two with funeral flowers and three at a later date from different angles. Martin N. Johnson died October 21, 1909 and was buried in the Petersburg N.D. cemetery. The town views have identified scenes, in a photographic postcard format, of Petersburg, N.D.

The Stella (White) Johnson file shows portraits of her at various ages, including graduation and a group stereograph of the graduation class. A four generation photograph of Betsy Jepson, Amanda White, Stella Johnson, Edith Johnson and Nellie Johnson is of interest. The Edith (Johnson) Skulason file contains portraits of Edith, her children, and one with their grandmother Stella. The Nellie (Johnson) Hydle file shows the wedding party posing next to a house, formatted as a photographic postcard. The Florence (Johnson) Karpe file has several portraits of

her as a young woman. Some are dated and include the studio name in Washington D.C. A candid print of Florence as a young girl in front of a wood pile, in addition to a print showing Florence holding several puppies titled “I have trouble of my own” on the front of photograph are of particular interest.

The [Nelson and Anna Johnson Family Series](#) covers Martin Johnson’s father, mother, brothers and sisters. Two individual portraits of Nelson Johnson and three of Anna Johnson, parents to Martin N. Johnson, appear to be taken at the same time. There is a view of the city of Bergen, Norway. Prints of the Johnson siblings are from various times including a set of four prints of the sibling taken at “Aunt Mary’s funeral.” Two postcards depict the oldest Scandinavian Methodist Church in the world at Cambridge Wisc. The Unidentified file has four unidentified group and individual portraits; one is of a woman shooting a gun.

The [White, Jepson, Houghton Families Series](#) include one portrait of Thomas Jepson. Four prints are identified as Betsy (Houghton) Jepson next to her house, and two prints include grandchildren identified as Nellie and Ralph or Florence. Five additional prints have different views of the house and out-buildings, identified as being at the homestead in Webster, Massachusetts. The Amanda (Jepson) White prints include several portraits including with other adults, the three prints of Amanda’s gravestone marker are cyanotypes. There are two portraits of Amos White.

The [Virna Johnson Series](#) images were taken when she attended the University of Chicago in 1923 and of grade school children. Virna Johnson, a niece of Martin N. Johnson, received a scholarship to study at the University of Chicago. Ten photographs are of adults on the University of Chicago campus the summer of 1923. Some of the people are identified by name and a few as teachers. The winter file are photographs of adults possibly on the University of Chicago campus, and some of the people are identified by name. Four identified postcards show scenes of the University of Chicago campus. The grade school children file is possible from the Child Health Demonstration Project in Fargo during the period 1923-1927, when Virna Johnson was principal at Washington School. One print shows children wearing coats which appear to be made out of blankets.

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