

Finding Aid to the Martin N. Johnson Family Papers

Johnson, Martin N., 1850-1909

Martin N. Johnson Family Papers, 1839-1954

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 85

Mss 1509

[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Box and Folder List](#)

OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the [Martin N. Johnson Family Photograph Collection](#)

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

Provenance: Donated by Ina and Virna Johnson, 1953-1954; Jane Harding, 1957 (Acc. 85), and Kirk Wilson, 2001 (Acc. 2630)

Property rights: Part of the collection was placed on loan to the Institute, and other items donated

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Citation: [Identification of item]. Martin N. Johnson Family Papers, MS 85, MS 1509, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo

BIOGRAPHY

Martin Nelson Johnson was born March 3, 1850 at Norway, Wisconsin, the son of Nelson and Anna (Selheim) Johnson who were Norwegian immigrants. Mr. Nelson was an ordained minister of the Methodist Church. Shortly thereafter the family moved to near Decorah, Iowa where they farmed. Martin Johnson attended Upper Iowa University at Fayette and Iowa State University from where he 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 Johnson family 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 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, N.D. He was buried in the Petersburg Cemetery. Mrs. Johnson died September 5, 1925. They had four children, Edith, Nellie, Ralph, and Florence. Mr. Johnson was a member of the Methodist Church and Sons of Norway.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **Martin N. Johnson Family Papers** consists mainly of family mementos and family history information on both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's families, as well as his brother Lewis C. Johnson. The collection has been organized into six series, Mr. & Mrs. Johnson, their children and families, family history material, Nelson Johnson, Martin Johnson's siblings and families, and subject files.

The [Martin Johnson Series](#) includes the book of Memorial Addresses and program in the United States Senate (1910) and a photocopy of the North Dakota House Journal for February 1, 1911 with memorial addresses given in a joint session of the legislature. There is also their wedding invitation (1879), invitation to the White House (1909), letterhead, and several political cartoons, including one that appeared in the Norwegian paper, *Basunen* at Hillsboro, North Dakota. The photocopy of the scrapbook contains many newspaper articles from 1908 during his election to the United States Senate. Mrs. Johnson's material includes birthday guests (1918), and obituaries on her death.

The [Martin Johnson Children Series](#) was collected mainly by Florence Johnson Karpe for a family history and deals almost entirely with her brothers and sisters and their families. Of note is Edith Johnson Skulason's typed manuscript, "Memoirs of Early Days in Nelson County, N.D." which recounts the events of their family homesteading near Petersburg in the 1880s. The remaining files contain correspondence and newspaper clippings.

The [Family History Series](#) includes files for Mrs. Johnson's various family lines, including the White, Jepson and Houghton families. None of these files are very extensive. Of note is an 1847 copy of Constitution and Officers of the Houghton Association with the Proceedings of the Houghton Meeting held at Worcester, Massachusetts, March 3, 1847. The White family file contains correspondence (1929-1934) related to family history.

The [Nelson Johnson Family Series](#) is more extensive, covering Mr. Martin Johnson's father and brother and sister's families. The Nelson Johnson material includes a typed biography (ca. 1935) by son John W. Johnson and which includes much genealogical information. There are photocopies of Mr. Johnson's Norwegian passport (1839) with translation, a baptismal certificate for Mrs. Johnson in Norwegian (1841) and Mr. Johnson's ordination certificate into the Methodist Episcopal Church (1856). Also of note are copies of letters written by some of the children commemorating the 100th anniversary of Mrs. Nelson Johnson's birth and which contain reminiscences and historical material on her life (1912); and a chronology of major events in the Johnson family.

The [Martin Johnson's Siblings Series](#) includes files for sisters Bessie and Martha that contain various newspaper clippings. The Lewis C. Johnson family material is more extensive. The main file contains biographical material, a short reminiscence of Mrs. Johnson related to pioneer life at Petersburg until the family moved to Fargo in 1884, admittance to the Dakota bar (1883), business cards, and a 1915 banquet program of the North Dakota Bar Association. Their daughter, Ina Johnson's material related to her fight (1941-1954) to be reinstated as a Fargo teacher after being dismissed in 1941 for asking for an investigation by the Fargo Board of Education of practices and policies which had lowered standards of scholarship and discipline

The [Subject Files Series](#) includes Virna Johnson's three scrapbooks documenting the period 1923-1927 when she was involved in the Child Health Demonstration Project at Fargo while she was principal at Washington School. The scrapbooks include newspaper clippings, forms, newsletters, several photographs, and various artifacts. Of final note is the periodical *Old Muskego Saga* for June 1940 that relates among other articles the history of the North Cape Lutheran Church at North Cape, Wisconsin.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

The following non-manuscript items were removed from the Martin N. Johnson Family Papers and have been sent to the section indicated.

Photographs (Institute Photo Mss 85)

- 30 photographic prints related to Virna Johnson's work with the Fargo Child Health Demonstration Project (1923-1927) and her scholarship study at the University of Chicago (1923).
- 98 photographic prints of Martin N. Johnson and family, Nelson Johnson family, Mrs. Johnson's family, and Petersburg, North Dakota.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Finding aid, and Biographical information

Martin Johnson Biographical Series

- 1/2 Martin N. Johnson, 1879-1910
- 1/3 Martin N. Johnson Memorial Address, 1910, and N.D. Legislature memorial addresses (photocopy), 1911
- 1/4 Mrs. Martin N. Johnson, 1910-1925

Martin Johnson Children Series

- Edith Johnson Skulason—
 - 1/5 Correspondence and clippings, 1939-1944
 - 1/6 "Memoirs of Early Days in Nelson County, N.D."
- Florence Johnson Karpe—
 - 1/7 Correspondence, 1929-1945
 - 1/8 D.A.R. applications
 - 1/9 Family history material
 - 1/10 Diploma, wedding invitation, etc., 1910-1918
- Nellie Johnson Hydle—
 - 1/11 Correspondence and clippings, 1917-1945
- Ralph K. Johnson—
 - 1/12 Newspaper clippings

Family History Series

- 1/13 Houghton family, 1847-ca. 1940
- 1/14 Jepson family
- 1/15 White family

Nelson Johnson Series

- 1/16 Typed biography by John W. Johnson, ca. 1935
- 1/17 Norwegian Passport, birth certificate and ordination papers, 1839-1856, 1944
- 1/18 Letters commemorating anniversary of Mrs. Johnson's 100th birthday, 1912
- 1/19 Chronology of events, 1812-1930

Martin Johnson Siblings Series

- 1/20 Bessie Johnson Clark family
- 1/21 Martha Johnson Anderson family
- 1/22 Lewis C. Johnson family, 1883-1944
 - 1/23 Ina Johnson, 1942-1954
 - 1/24 Virna Johnson, ca. 1923-1927

Subject Files Series

1/25

Old Muskego Saga, June 1940

Scrapbooks—

Mss 1509.1-3

Virna Johnson scrapbooks, ca. 1923-1927

Mss 1509.4

Martin N. Johnson scrapbook (photocopy), 1908