

W. J. Matthews

VUML

Joseph Elmer Johnson

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Bx 1 (continued)

Fd 4 (continued)

attached, his wife and home at Genoa dislocated, his little son had perished, and his high hopes of political prominence now had become a definite impossibility.

Fd 5

Diary No. 5, January 1-June 2, 1860

As this diary commences, Johnson seems to be well on the way of establishing a supply station at Wood River (a small settlement on the banks of Wood River in Custer County, Nebraska). He has a store in operation, is lodging travelers, and with the aid of hired men is building an ice house, blacksmith shop, mill, kiln, stable, and home. How many people made up this small settlement is unknown, but Johnson mentions his brother Joel H. and wife Margaret Threlkeld, his brother William and wife Jane, and his hired helpers Vant, Jim, Sam, and Mr. Carroll and wife. Johnson has helped survey the town site, and his time is also occupied making patent medicines for sale and in taking care of the health of his group. Jane, his sister-in-law, is in poor health much of the time and many nights he sits up to give her medication (quinine powders).

On New Year's Day, January 1, 1860, while the others attend church, Johnson remains at home to commune with his thoughts concerning his forty-three years of life. His diary paints a poignant picture of a sensitive, loving husband and father and tells of his "heart gushing of happiness and heart-crushings of hopelessness." He speaks of the tenderness he feels for his children, is touched by the love and support of his wives, and is terribly lonesome without them.

His old friend, Dr. Henry, who lives within eight miles of Wood River, visits Johnson often. They spend evenings at each others' establishments and pass pleasant hours dining and in good conversation. After an exhaustive day of building, Johnson will spend his evenings writing letters home (many to Eliza whom he constantly tries to appease and encourage), and writing poetry and articles to be published. To make the long winter evenings pass more rapidly, he joins in card games, many times winning all the "raisins."

The weather is extremely cold with temperatures hovering around zero or below. Work goes on despite the weather and they rise to an early morning candlelight breakfast.

See

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Platte River Road Narratives

entry # 1778

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When the temperature rises above zero, he says it is warm and pleasant.

He sends supply wagons to Fort Kearney, and he finds trade good--the soldiers just having received their paychecks. Flour is sold at \$5.25 per sack. He travels to Kearney City by stagecoach and also visits the fort, meeting the military officers.

A meeting is held and a club organized with twelve members subscribing to the articles Johnson presents. They wish him to act as president, but he declines.

On Prairie Creek he files a claim for timberland, which is plentiful, but he later concludes that adobes for building are cheaper and quite as good as other materials.

On January 20 Johnson, Vant, and brother Will start for home (Ellisdale) and have trouble with a broken wagon tongue that has to be repaired. They pass many Pawnee Indians on their way. Johnson stops by the Saunders home where he finds his son Charles who delights him as he greets his "Big Dadda." Johnson plays with him and loves him, noting what a pretty and intelligent child he is. His next stop is at Florence where he meets Eliza. Promising to return to her soon, he travels on to Ellisdale where he is greeted with surprise, joy, and love by all the rest of his family.

While home he receives many visitors for tea--Colonel Palmer and Judge Sherman, among others, who come to talk politics. Hannah and Harriet accompany him to Crescent City and from there he goes up the Platte River to check on a supply wagon being sent to Denver. He makes good his promise to Eliza as he returns to Florence to spend time with her. He takes her with him to Shell Creek where they stay with their friends, the Norths. At Shinn's Ferry he conducts more business with supply wagons. Travel is difficult because of the cold and snow-blocked roads. He returns to Ellisdale on February 10.

On February 11, he goes to Council Bluffs where he attends a political convention and finds he still has many friends who elect him secretary, but he refuses to be a delegate to the State Convention. His enemies are surprised to see him, for they thought he would

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never return. Johnson has a great feeling of satisfaction knowing that he still has the respect of many friends. The next day he attends court to answer to the charge of polygamy. Johnson, a strong Democrat, feels the polygamy suit is a political move brought about by his Republican enemies to oust him from the state. He attends court and asks for a change of venue, feeling he will receive better treatment in another county. This is granted. The following day he again seeks counsel from his lawyers, but after that he never again mentions anything about a trial in his diary and one is left to wonder if the case was dropped or if it was ever tried.

Johnson then returns to Crescent City and prepares to take his press to Wood River. He consults with a man named Baker who says "take the press when you please, your word is good to me." (It is not known if the press was still held in the court or if Johnson owed money on it.) His press is packed, along with seed corn, and thirteen boxes packed with goods. He sorts through the files of the Crescent City Oracle and says he feels sad but sees hope of getting off soon.

Here the diary ends and the next entry is May 25, 1860 at Ellisdale. He has evidently been home again from Wood River and is on his return trip taking Mollie, his daughter, and his two helpers, Ally and Vant, back to Wood River.

They leave Ellisdale at noon with three teams of horses for Wood River. The wagons are loaded at Council Bluffs and the journey commences. They have an accident with one of the wagons breaking a wheel, and Mollie's dress catches fire, but is extinguished without harm to her. The weather turns cold, rainy, and windy. And although it is nearly June, Johnson says he puts on his woolen "panty." When possible, he camps at a ranch of a friend where they can sleep inside and where they enjoy visiting, music, and dancing. As he travels, he reads Bayard Taylor's Travels in India. They stay with their friends, the Norths, where he picks up loaned books and leaves others.

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A stop is made again at Saunders where he visits Eliza and his son Charles who is joyous over the presents his father brings him. He mentions buying supplies for Eliza. He is preparing to send Eliza and Charles to the Salt Lake Valley in August with his brother Joel and his company. Joseph is to follow when he can get his families ready and liquidate his property and businesses.

As his journey proceeds, he sells subscriptions to his paper, The Huntsman Echo, which he started publishing in Wood River in April. He also makes arrangements with a stage driver to leave some of his papers with him to sell.

They encounter many Indians who often come into camp to beg. He also notes seeing many antelope, picking beautiful flowers, and camping by fifteen companies of Californians. He puts out his stove and bakes bread and enjoys plenty of fresh milk. He and his daughter Mollie have a special relationship. He tells of the talks they have and their reminiscences about their loved ones at home.

He writes a short biography for his brother Joel's journal. Recalling his youth and earlier years, he thinks more strongly of those he loves and he says "how vividly it brought to mind the early loves and happenings when Harriet was young and pleasant and made me happy."

Fd 6

Diary No. 6, January 14-March 1, 1873

This diary of Joseph E. Johnson commences on January 14, 1873--an interval of thirteen years since Diary No. 5. During that time, many important events have occurred in the lives of the Johnsons. Joseph had continued building on to his supply station at Wood River and publishing his paper The Huntsman Echo, but was secretly preparing to move his families to the Salt Lake Valley. His third wife, Eliza Saunders, and her son Charles traveled to Salt Lake with Joseph's brother Joel and his company in August of 1860. By the following year in August of 1861, Joseph and the rest of his families numbering eleven persons, joined by other relatives and friends, left for the West, arriving some seven weeks later. Not wishing to make Salt Lake City their permanent home, Johnson may have traded the lot he purchased