

1823

Charles F. Johnson
3556 Hartford Village Way
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29466

December 12, 2002

Ms. Betty Allen
Assistant Archivist
Union College
Schenectady, New York, 12308-3149

Dear Ms. Allen:

Noting with much pleasure the interest in Charles F. Johnson, my great-grandfather, expressed in your July 24 letter to me, I send you transcripts of two of his obituaries. Both I suspect are from newspapers in Owego, New York, where, he lived for most of his adult life.

His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all attended Yale. Why did he break the Yale succession? An interesting story. His high-living first cousin, Robert Charles Johnson, was headed for Yale. My great-grandfather's parents died when he was young; he and his sisters were raised by an uncle. The latter did not want Charles F. Johnson at college with his cousin. So he attended Union. But a few years later so did Robert Johnson. Class of 1827, I believe.

In addition to the obituaries, I enclose two photographs of a portrait of my great-grandfather. Keep them both.

Sincerely,
Charles F. Johnson
Charles F. Johnson, III

Charles F. Johnson's dates:

Born: September 10, 1804
Died: July 6, 1882

Obituary Notes.

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Charles Frederick Johnson.

Died, at the residence of his son-in-law, William Bellamy, Esq., Dorchester, Massachusetts, on the 6th instant, Charles Frederick Johnson, Esq., late of the town of Tioga, N. Y., aged 78 years.

The deceased came to this county in 1837, accompanied by his wife and infant son. He had married, in 1835, Miss Sarah Dwight Woolsey, daughter of William W. Woolsey, Esq., a merchant of New York city and first president of the Merchants' Exchange. Mrs. Johnson was sister of Theodore Woolsey, LL. D., who, for twenty-five years, was president of Yale College. He was also accompanied, or was joined soon after his arrival in this county, by Ezekiel Lovejoy, M. D., his classmate at Union College. The grandfather of the deceased owned lands in different parts of this county, which was perhaps the principal reason why the deceased came to this part of the State. He bought the farm on which he resided for so many years, soon making for himself and family a genteel and comfortable home, just west of where the Owego creek enters the Susquehanna river, a most sightly and beautiful location, in immediate proximity to the village of Owego. Here, on this large farm, which for the most was managed by an experienced agriculturist, he spent a life diversified by literary and scientific pursuits. He took special delight in the study of the Latin and Greek languages. In metaphysics he was well read. He spent much, both of time and money, in scientific investigation, and his inventions were numerous and valuable. The town clock, which for many years tolled the time to the village of Owego from the tower of the old Baptist church, was invented and manufactured by him.

He superintended, and to a great extent educated his children, two boys and two girls: Charles Frederick, a partner in the manufacturing firm of Johnson, Gere & Truman, and William W., professor of mathematics in the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and author and publisher of several excellent works in advanced mathematics. His daughters are Miss Katherine B. Johnson, now artist in Paris, and Mrs. Anna Bellamy, with whom he lived since he left this county, after the

death of his wife which occurred in 1869, in Paris while making the grand tour of Europe.

During the last years of his life his health was much impaired. He gradually passed, more from the effects of decaying vitality than from the operation of any special disease.

He was a gentleman singularly pure in life, with scholarly attainments of no mean order, a clear-headed inventor, but careless in pushing his discoveries before the public, living more among the ancients than in the social circle of every-day surroundings.

Obituary.

Charles Frederick Johnson.

Charles Frederick Johnson, formerly of Tioga, died at Dorchester, Mass., July 6th, in the seventy-eighth year of his age.

Mr. Johnson was born at Stratford, Conn., in 1804. Both of his parents dying while he was an infant, he was brought up in the family of his grandfather, William Samuel Johnson, son of Samuel Johnson, one of the earliest settlers in Stratford, and the first Episcopal clergyman ordained in Connecticut. The deceased graduated at Union College, in the same class with the late Dr. Lovejoy, of this village, and three after William H. Seward. After graduation, Mr. Johnson spent three years studying in France and was present during the memorable scenes of the "three days" revolution of July, 1830, in Paris. Returning to this country, he married, in 1835, Sarah Dwight Woolsey, youngest daughter of William Walton Woolsey, one of the old-time merchants of New York. Two years later, he removed to this county and bought the Meadowbank farm, in Tioga, where he resided after the death of his wife, till 1876, when he removed to the home of his daughter, Mrs. Anna J. Bellamy, of Dorchester, Mass., whose tender and loving care was the comfort of his declining years, and who received his dying breath.

Mr. Johnson remained a student during his entire life, giving most of his

attention to the Latin language and literature. In 1874 he published a metrical translation of the great poem of Lucretius, "De Rerum Natura," which was received with considerable favor on both sides of the Atlantic. He also possessed very marked inventive powers, though he lacked the practical sagacity necessary to render new ideas pecuniarily remunerative. He was originator of what is known as the atmospheric dock for raising vessels, now in use in every seaport in the world, and of the circular combination lock, which may be seen on most American safes, and of several other inventions, which came into general use after he had abandoned them. During the later years of his life he became much interested in philosophy and was esteemed one of the best read men in the country on that abstruse subject. After going over the entire field of Greek and German metaphysics, he remained more than ever convinced of the reality of the Divine Government and of the spiritual basis of revelation, although he never joined any organized body of Christians. Those who heard him talk on the subject— which he did rarely— cannot cease to regret that he could not be induced to write and publish the results of his study and reflection. His arguments were the reflections of a singularly calm, lucid, fair, and well informed mind on the "problem of life," the why and wherefore of this perplexed existence of ours and which is not a dream surrounded by a deeper sleep but a state of semi-consciousness, from which we are aroused by the Angel of Death. He looked forward calmly to his own death as an awakening to fuller powers. When it came it was unaccompanied by physical pain and was simply a gradual passing from the known to the unknown, from the confused to the clear, from our world to God's.

He leaves four children to cherish his memory— Charles Frederick, of Tioga; William Woolsey, of Annapolis, Md.; Anna Johnson Bellamy, of Dorchester Mass.; and Katherine Bayard Johnson, of Paris, France.

Death of Mrs. Charles Frederick Johnson

A letter from Paris dated March 1st, announces the sudden death of Mrs.

UNION COLLEGE ALUMNI REGISTRATION

Trinity College '33

Name Charles Frederick Johnson Class 1844

Addresses: Residence New York City Telephone Dec 13 1947

Business inventor; poet Telephone _____

News for Union Alumnus:

HP note -> *925th 925th*
U.C.

On the reverse side of this card, list prospective freshmen in whom you are interested, giving their home address, school, and year of graduation.

The Placement Bureau is always glad to hear of openings for college men with your organization or other firms in your area who are in quest of personnel.

Suggestions or questions:

Frederic A. Wyatt '32
Director of Alumni Relations

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CHARLES F. JOHNSON, '23,

was born at Stratford, Conn., about 1801. He studied law, passed some time in France and then settled in Tioga Co., N. Y., near Owego, as a gentleman farmer; removing in 1876 to live with one of his children at Dorchester, Mass. He continued his classical studies, publishing a translation of Lucretius in 1874, and was well read in Philosophy. He had little taste or aptitude for practical affairs. His early politics were Whig, but he became a Democrat in 1855. He died in August, 1882, at Dorchester, leaving two daughters and two sons.