

WILLIAM JOHNSON
Haskell County, Kansas

Written by Eva Mae Cooper

Told by William Johnson

** Additional information added about William Johnson*

“I was born in Shelby County, Illinois, and was reared in Putnam County, Missouri. I was a farmer by trade & choice, and I was attracted by tidings of level free land in the west. We had heard numerous good things about western Kansas. So, my brother, George, plus my father and stepmother, Mr. and Mrs. John H. Johnson, and I packed all our belongings in a covered wagon and came to Kansas, little knowing where we would settle. We saw several places we liked, but they were not open to homesteaders. Therefore, we kept going. We passed through Plains and entered what is now known as Haskell County. We did not see many signs of habitation. No land was broken except where the homesteader plowed the soil for his tree claim* and that coming winter, I remember we plowed quite a few claims. People would hire us to do the plowing. We charged, as I recall, \$2.50 an acre. A cousin who lived in Meade County and I would take provisions and bedding along and spend several days plowing tree claims. I filed on a homestead about five miles northeast of what is now Sublette, living there for about two years in a half dugout.

Then I went up in Montana and remained there ten or twelve years, working on a ranch and operating a business in town. With the stake I garnered in Montana, I returned to this vicinity and established myself as a cattleman. I bought a section about a mile east of Copeland on tax deeds, where my cousin and I put three hundred head of cattle on the ranch. After several years, we abandoned the cattle business because the market was discouraging due to settlers breaking out the prairies and spoiling the range.

I had taken life easy until 1922 when I plowed the sod of my ranch. I have been farming ever since. In 1924, I sold this ranch and bought a half section nine miles northeast of Sublette, which later I sold to Mr. C. G. Dennis. I now rent seven quarters northeast of Sublette. I would rather grow wheat than engage in any other business. It does not tie you down. The wanderlust has bitten me severely, and with the means to travel, I make every winter a gay excursion.

When we first came to this place, there wasn't anything between the Arkansas River and here, which made the blizzards terrible. I do not believe this country will ever see those blizzards again. Improvements to the highways stop the snow from drifting. One time a gentleman and I were working on that Rock Island cut between Liberal and Plains. A big blizzard came up one night. We each had a team, which we kept in a

tent. The next morning we went out and could not see anything except their noses. The snow was packed in and around them so bad that we had to shovel them out.

We waited forty years for a railroad, but there was little reason for one since there wasn't any business here. Yet this country did not start developing much until the railroad did arrive.

The county was just as good when we arrived here as it is today. However, we did not have the machinery or the knowledge that we now have concerning wheat production. The future seems to be very promising.”

**Tree claims were a part of the Homestead Act that started in 1862, where a homesteader who had claimed up to 160 acres of land could also make a tree claim. The owner of the land had to plant ten acres of trees and keep them alive for eight years.*

Additional Information WILLIAM JOHNSON

WILLIAM JOHNSON, son of John Henry Johnson and Mary Ann Williamson, was born on 1 Dec 1858 in Shelby County, Illinois. In 1870, the family was still living in Shelby County in the town of Windsor. As a child, William lived in the state of Missouri. He later moved with his family to Haskell County, Kansas.

William never married. He passed away on 7 Oct 1936 in Haskell County, Kansas. William's death was caused by an automobile accident. He was buried at the Haskell County Cemetery in Sublette, Kansas.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES EXPLAINING THE CAUSE OF WILLIAM JOHNSON'S DEATH

The Emporia (Kansas) Gazette, Wednesday, 7 Oct 1936

GAS TRUCK UP IN FLAMES

DRIVERS BURNED IN CAR CRASH NEAR FORD, KANSAS

Dodge City, Oct 7 – A gasoline transport truck turned over and caught fire when it crashed on Highway 154 near Ford, along with another automobile. Both drivers were taken to a hospital here, each in a critical condition.

The injured men are E. Stucky, a Hutchinson truck driver, who was severely burned over his entire body, and William Johnson, 77, Sublette, whose injuries included fractures of both legs and a crushed jaw. They were the only persons in the two machines.

The car turned over on the opposite side of the truck and did not catch fire. The cause of the accident, which occurred in a dip between two hills near a curve in the highway, was not apparent.

A passing truckload of WPA workers saw the crash and pulled Stucky from the burning cab and Johnson from his car.

Dr. F. M. Coffman of Ford fainted and fell out of the ambulance while accompanying Stucky to the hospital. The ambulance had just started, and he was only slightly injured.

The Emporia (Kansas) Gazette, Thursday 8 Oct 1936

DRIVERS' INJURIES FATAL

Gas Truck-Car Collision Occurred at Ford Wednesday

Dodge City, Oct 8 – Injuries suffered in an automobile & gasoline transport truck collision near Ford yesterday proved fatal last night to E. Stucky of Hutchinson and William Johnson, 77, Sublette, drivers of the vehicles.