

Biography of Earnest Nichol Johnson
--Hazel Rood *niece*

Earnest Nichol Johnson was born on November 28, 1874 to Ole Lars Johnson and Carolina Steenstrup Johnson. He was born near Farmington, Minnesota which is in Eureka Township in Dakota County. In 1894 his father and other farmers shipped horses to North Dakota, and Earnest was given the chance to take them. He had heard much about North Dakota and desired greatly to see it. He did not intend to remain here, however. But when he got here and saw how it thrived, he decided to remain because he like it much better than Minnesota. Johnson arrived in North Dakota in the early part of March in 1894. He succeeded in getting work at the establishment of Hammer and Condy. His work was to buy and herd the cattle. In the winter there were many storms, and he endured many hardships. He was often forced to let the horses have the rein, and they were usually able to find the way home. In 1896 and 1897, which is called the snow winter, he hauled the mail from Sanborn as the trains were snow bound. The only road he had to follow was the railroad track, this often being very difficult to find. He made six trips during this winter. He bought a livery barn which he had for fifteen years. Here he broke many broncos and wild horses.

Once he was forced to go to Valley City for supplies. The storm was so bad he was forced to walk twelve miles in front of the horses, and by the aid of a shovel, keeping the road. In 1896 on the 22nd day of November, he was married to Natalia Rood. On this week he had been sent out to get a bunch of cattle. As usual it was storming pretty bad. He had a safe place from the storm in a small house. He waited three days for the storm to clear up. On the third, however, he remembered it was his birthday and the date set for his wedding. Rather than disappoint his future wife before they were even wedded, he started out. The work was slow, but finally he succeeded in getting them driven to Hammer and Condy's farm, then eight miles from town. He hurried his horse the following eight miles and finally reached town. With a few hasty preparations he was ready for the wedding. The time for the wedding was seven-thirty. The bride waited long, knowing the groom would arrive at some time during the night. At ten O'clock he appeared and they were married.

After his marriage he settled down to real bronco busting. These afforded him many runaways. On one trip the team ran away, and the pole went into the ground hurling the wagon far into the air. Mr. Johnson fell out hitting the pole. He was unconscious for several hours. When he fell, he injured his ear badly which caused the blood to flow. As the day was very cold, it caused the blood to freeze. This cold ice again made him conscious. This trip cost him much as his face became paralyzed on one side, and he cracked his ear drum. Johnson jokes much about how his face looked then, for every time he laughed you could notice it only on one side. However, his face is now all right, but he is quite deaf in one ear.

At another time he ran straddle of a rock which threw him out of the wagon. He was unconscious because the jolt hurled him out. When he returned to town, he went to look for his horses and found them five miles from town in a large grain field.

In 1906 he went and took up a claim near New England. He went to Dickinson by train and to New England by stage. He took horses and set out to look for land. He found some that proved satisfactory ten miles from New England in Hettinger County, Steele Township between the Rainy Buttes and the Teepees. Their home was a frame shanty, one room 14x16 feet with sod outside. They had forty miles to the nearest railroad town, Dickinson, and did not go there frequently. He moved his household furniture from here, and it took very long going across a large creek where he almost had a tip-over. He lived here ten months.

In the fall his brother joined him, taking up a claim near Earnest's land. That winter diptheria became very bad. Two of his brother's children got the disease and died. Earnest started across the snow-laden hills to Dickinson to purchase coffins. It was slow and tedious labor. His children also got the disease and he lost his oldest son, Willie. The winter was cold, but they succeeded in getting sufficient fuel from the coal veins in the Bad Lands.

In 1917 he moved back to Cooperstown. He sold his livery barn and purchased the West Prairie Stock Farm which is sixteen miles west and two miles north of Cooperstown. There he spent eighteen years leading a happy and prosperous life. In the election of 1926, he was made sheriff of Griggs County.

His descendants are: Arthur, Wilhelm, Luella, Corpora and Melvin all of Cooperstown, and Mrs. Harold Fowler who lives on the home farm, her post office in Binford. He has two grandsons, Gordon Wayne and Ronald Quinten, who are Melvin's children. Two children, Willie and Corpora died at about the age of ten and a pair of twins early in their infancy.