

HISTORY OF THE JOHNSTON FAMILY

By A. Johnston¹

My ancestors **Johnston** came to America from Scotland.

My maternal ancestor, **John Linden** (*sic* **Linder**), came to America from Switzerland. Both **Johnston** and **Linden** landed at Norfolk, Virginia, about 1770 or 1780, from whence they moved to South Carolina, **Johnston** to Chesterfield District and **Linden** to Charleston, where they settled and raised families.

Their two oldest boys, **John Johnston** and **John Linden**, moved together from South Carolina to the Mississippi Territory or to that part now composing the State of Alabama. They first reached the Tombigbee River at or near Cotton Gin Port, where they constructed a raft to move their negroes and goods down the river on.

Having embarked on this raft their negroes and other plunder, the raft started down the river, but it was soon wrecked and about 100 negroes were drowned. Having repaired the raft, they continued down the river to **McIntosh** Bluff, now in Washington County, Alabama, where **John Johnston** embarked and located. **John Linden** continued down the river to what is known as the cutoff, it being a passage of water from the Tombigbee to the Alabama River. Through this cutoff **John Linden** proceeded to the Alabama River and landed at Montgomery Hill on the east side of the river, where he settled.

The friendly relations between the **Johnston** and the **Linden** families continued, although **Johnston** was poor and **Linden** was rich, and their families were often together. An amusing incident will here be related, in which a young couple were united by a functionary not hitherto known as participating in such sacred rights.

At the house of **Sam Mims** (after whom **Mims** Fort, where the Indians massacred the Whites soon after, was named), a wealthy countryman, there was a great ball on Christmas night 1800. **Daniel Johnston** and **Miss Elizabeth Linden** had for some time loved each other. She was rich and he was poor, and of course the parents of the former objected to the marriage or "pairing" as it was then called. On the Christmas night mentioned, a large party was assembled at old **Sam Mims's**, and the ball was in full blast. In the midst of the enjoyment, the lovers, in company with several other young people of both sexes, secretly left the house, entered some canoes, paddled down the river to Fort Stoddard, where they arrived an hour before daylight. **Capt. Shaumburg**, Commander of the fort, who had risen early to make his Christmas eggnog, was implored to join the lovers in the bonds of matrimony. The proposition astounded the good-natured old German, who protested his ignorance in such matters and assued them he was only a military commandant, having no authority whatever to make people husband and wife. They instructed him, telling him that the Federal Government had placed him there as a general protector, etc. After the eggnog had circulated pretty freely, the commandant placed the lovers before him and proceeded to perform the following ceremony: "I, **Capt. Shaumburg** of the 2nd Regiment, U. S. Army, and Commandant of Fort Stoddard, do hereby pronounce you husband

¹ Arista Johnston, born 4 NOV 1849 at Goodwater, Clarke Co., MS, the son of James Burr Johnston and Isabella A. Johnston, (both had same last name being cousins), and the grandson of Col. Jack Johnston, Indian Agent.

and wife. Go home, behave yourselves, and multiply and replenish the Tensaw country." The happy couple entered their canoes, returned home, and were pronounced the best married or paired couple in the country. (Picket History of Alabama, pp. 183-184)

My mother, **Isabella A. Johnston**, was a daughter of the above couple.

John Johnston, or **Col Jack Johnston**, as he was called, the oldest son² of **John Johnston**, who moved from South Carolina, and **Miss Jane Bettis**, whose parents also came from South Carolina, were married. **Jas. Burr Johnston**, my father, was a son of this couple.

My grandmother, **Jane (Bettis) Johnston**, came from Chesterfield District, South Carolina. Her family, as well as the **Johnston** and **Linden** families, were Whigs in politics. Just before my grandmother left South Carolina, a fight took place between the Whigs, the Tories, and English at a place called Old Cherow in Chesterfield District. The Whigs barricaded themselves in an old Presbyterian Church and bade defiance to their foes. The Tories and English made every effort to dislodge them, but without success, until they sent for a cannon. They then captured the old church, killing all the defenders, including three of my grandmother's brothers. (It is said that this statement is engraved on the tombs of the Bettis brothers at Old Cherow in Chesterfield District, where it can now be seen.)

Col. Jack Johnston, as I have said, married **Miss Jane Bettis**, whose oldest son, **James Burr Johnston**, was my father. So it will be seen that my mother and father were first cousins and both named **Johnston**, my father being the son of **John Johnston** and **Jane Bettis**, and my mother the daughter of **Daniel Johnston** and **Elizabeth Linden**. **James Burr Johnston** and **Isabella A. Johnston**, my father and mother, were married at Fort Stoddard, Alabama, in December 1828. As stated, they were first cousins both named **Johnston**.

At this place I will state how my father's middle name came to be **Burr**.

Col. Jack, my grandfather, lived at or near **McIntosh** Bluff, Washington County, Alabama, when my father was born. It was about this time that **Co. Aaron Burr**, Ex-Vice President of the United States, was fleeing from Washington, hoping to cross the Mississippi River, where it was said he expected to found a government composed of the States lying West of the Mississippi River. In his flight, he passed through Washington County, Alabama, and stayed all night with **Col. Jack Johnston**, my grandfather. My grandparents were so impressed with **Col. Burr's** courtly manner and splendid address that they named their son, who was then an infant, after him.

My grandfather, **Col. Jack Johnston**, and my father, **James Burr Johnston**, moved with their families to Clark County, Mississippi, in 1837 or 1838.

Col. Jack Johnston was an Indian Agent for the Government. He was a lawyer, and it was he who wrote the treaty between the U. S. Government and the Choctaw Indians, known as

² Note by Eleanor Wicker: that in his father's will, Daniel is listed as the oldest son and Daniel is also listed as oldest on an early family group sheet.

the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty. The Indian chiefs who represented the Choctaws were **Greenwood, Leflore** (*sic Greenwood LeFlore*, one name not two), **Oakaoba**, and **Postoak**.

Col. Jack, with his son, **James Burr**, and his little grandson, **Everette**, finally moved the Choctaws to the Indian nation in 1845, where he, **Col. Jack**, married a half-Indian Woman and settled, his former wife being dead.³

Col. Jack raised a family in the Indian Territory, had three sons, **Douglas, Frank**, and **Edward**. **Douglas** was at one time Governor of the Territory.⁴

James Burr Johnston, my father, lived in Clark County, Mississippi, until his death, which was in 1851. He served in the Indian Wars and was at one time Col. Of State Militia.

James Burr Johnston, Jr., my brother, was born October 5, 1843 at Goodwater, Mississippi, and died August 20, 1917, at Cybur, Mississippi, and his wife, **Mary Holder** was born June 19, 1843 at Hals Lake, Alabama, now called Carlton, and died April 20, 1931.

I, **Arista Johnston**, was born near Goodwater, Clark County, Mississippi, November 4, 1849. When I was four or five years old, my mother, **Isabella A.**, who was then a widow, moved to Mobile, and from there to **McIntosh** Bluff, Washington County, Alabama. I stayed in Alabama until I was about 19 years old, was there during the Civil War. My people had plenty, but the war was going on, so my education was neglected. My mother often started me to school, but soon the recruiting officers would come and conscript the teacher and all the boys from 16 years and up. I attended school a short time near St. Stephens, Alabama. The teacher was named **Micky**. He went off as lieutenant in First Volunteer Company from Washington County and was killed at Seven Pines, Virginia. My next teacher was **Prof. Shouldwater** at Prairie Bluff, Wilcox County. I attended school about three months, when the teacher and larger boys were taken to the army. I went to **Prof. Casteel** two or three months. **Casteel** was a Methodist preacher. He was raised in Paulding, Jasper County, Mississippi. I was going to school at Pine Jackson, Alabama, to a wounded soldier, when the Yankees came through, breaking up the school and ending the war.

In 1869 I moved back to my old home in Clark County, Shubuta Mississippi, which I still owned, where I married **Miss Amelia Heidelberg**, daughter of **Samuel Heidelberg** of Jasper County. By this marriage I had two sons, **Everette Laviga** and **Ernest Arista**, and one daughter, **Edna Earl**. **Everette Laviga** is practicing dentistry in Mobile, **Ernest Arista** is practicing dentistry in Meridian, Mississippi, and **Edna Earl** is married to **C. W. Leggett**, a merchant in Shubuta. My first wife died in August 1873.

My second wife, **Mary A. McCoy**, daughter of **J. N. McCoy**, of Augusta, Mississippi, has seven children, three boys and four girls. **Percy W.**, the oldest boy, is now finishing his course in dentistry at Atlanta, Georgia. Her second son, **Jas. Burr**, is at home farming. Her third son, **Sam M.**, is in the sophomore class at A. & M. C. Her eldest daughter, **Ruby May**, who graduated at I. I. & C., married **L. W. Smith**, druggist at Shubuta. The second daughter,

³ The "half-Indian" woman was Mary Ann Cheadle.

⁴ Douglas H. Johnston was Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory.

Claribel, is at home. The third daughter, **Maggie**, and fourth, **Lois**, are in high school at Shubuta.

I have farmed all my life and made a success at it. I first ran for the legislature in 1899, was elected, and served in the session of 1900-02. I was elected again in 1907, had three opponents, [___blank___] lawyer, and farmer. I was elected in the first primary by 502 votes over all.

My oldest brother, **E. N. Johnston**, 78 years old, now lives at State Line Mississippi. He, it was who helped my grandfather emigrate the Indians. My next oldest brother, **James Burr, Jr.**, lives at Chioora, Wayne County, Mississippi. He is 64 years old, and was a member of the House of Representatives in 1890.

I have been a member of the Methodist Church since 1871. I am a Democrat and have voted for every Democrat candidate for President since the war, except **Horace Greeley**, couldn't stomach him, and I took **Parker** as a bitter dose. Voted for **Jas. K. Vardeman** for Governor and U. S. Senator.

This is the 26th day of September, 1907.

A. JOHNSTON

From a Biographical Sketch of Mississippi Legislators:

Clarke County

ARISTA JOHNSTON, of Shubuta, was born November 4, 1849, at Goodwater, Clarke County, Miss., the son of **James Burr Johnston** and his wife, **Isabella A. Johnston**. His parents were of the same surname, being cousins, but his remote paternal ancestors were from Scotland, and his maternal from Sweden. The grandfather of **Mr. Johnston**, known as **Colonel Jack Johnston**, was Indian Agent for the Government and drew up the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, between the United States and the Choctaws, which provided for the removal of the tribe beyond the Mississippi. The subject of this sketch attended the common schools of his vicinity, but owing to the disorganized conditions caused by the war, his opportunities were but limited. From youth his occupation has been that of a farmer, in which line he has succeeded well. He was elected to the Legislature in 1899, serving in the sessions of 1900 and 1902; in December, 1906, he was elected Mayor of Shubuta; was elected to the House of Representatives November 5, 1907. He is a Democrat, and a Steward in the M. E. Church South. **Mr. Johnston** has been twice married; his first wife was **Amelia Heidelberg**, daughter of **Samuel Heidelberg** and wife, **Elizabeth (Granbery) Heidelberg**, of Jasper County; his second wife was **Mary A. McCoy**, daughter of **J. M. McCoy** and wife, **Mary (Moseley) McCoy**, of Augusta. By his first marriage he had three children: **Everett Laviga Johnston**, of Mobile, Ala.; **Ernest Arista Johnston**, of Meridian, Miss.; and **Mrs. Edna Earl (Johnston) Leggett**, of Shubuta. By his second marriage he has seven children: **Percy Walker**, **James Burr**, **Samuel G.**, **Mrs. Ruby (Johnston) Smith**, of Shubuta; **Clarabelle**, **Maggie** and **Lois**.

Contract between Atty. J. P. Hagler & A. B. Cotton, 1911:

STATE OF TX _____ {}

COUNTY OF _____ {}

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

This agreement made and entered into, this the _____ day of _____

A.D., 1911, by and between _____ an heir of Col. John Johnston Sr. by his

first wife _____ Johnston, both of whom are now deceased, and J.P. Hagler of

Fort Worth, Texas.

WITNESSETH:

THAT WHEREAS HERETOFORE, to-wit: - About the year of 1851-2, the United States employed the said Colonel John Johnston Sr. to move the Four Town Tribe of Indians who were of Chocktaw and Chickasaw blood, from their then place of abode on their reservation in the State of Mississippi to the Eastern part of the Indian Territory, now state of Oklahoma, and in consideration of the services and amount of expenses that would necessarily incurred in moving said tribe of Indians, the said Col. John Johnston Sr. was to receive and did receive the sum of \$600,000.00 from the United States Government, and that thereafterwards, to-wit about 1857-8 the said Col. John Johnston Sr. invested said amounts received for said services from the United States Government as above stated, and in addition thereto, the amounts remaining unpaid, due him by the United States for such services [*unreadable (to the Indi?)*]ans lying and being situated in their Indian Territory and that thereafterwards by reason of the Government wishing to set aside all the lands lying and being situated in said territory to this and other tribes of Indians, it, the said Government of the United States contracted to purchase and did purchase from said Colonel John Johnston Sr., deceased, all the lands which he possessed of which was situated in said Territory, and agreed to pay as purchase price therefore, the sum of \$4,855,000.00. Which amount of money was due under the terms of sale, to said Colonel John Johnston Sr., and the Congress of the United States, after due consideration, in the year of 1860-61 appropriated the said sum of \$4,855,000.00 with which to pay the said Colonel John Johnston Sr., according to the terms of sale: but after the appropriation was made, when according to law, said appropriation bill was presented to the n President of the United States being Abraham Lincoln, vetoed the bill, giving as his reason "Because said money was going to be brought South and might probably be used against the United States Government in support of the rebellion and the Confederate Cause".

NOW THEREFORE, it being the desire of the undersigned heirs and legal representatives of the said Colonel John Johnston Sr., to prosecute said claim for \$4,855,000.00 to a final determination and whereas,

The heirs of the said Colonel John Johnston being desirious of securing the services of the said J.P. Hagler of Fort Worth, Texas, for the purpose of prosecuting said claim and securing said money which is justly due the legal and lawful heirs of Colonel John Johnston Sr., deceased, AND WHEREAS, the said J. P. Hagler will be placed to so much trouble and expense in the prosecution of said claim against the United States Government, the said J. P. Hagler, agreeing to pay all his expenses incurred in the prosecution of said claim, NOW THEREFORE

[Remainder of contract is employment agreement to pay Hagler 1/2 of what he collects.]

[Hand written note at bottom of last page:]

Duplicate of contract & p/a signed by A B Cotton.

Yours truly,

J P Hagler