

William E. Johnston and his first wife Elizabeth Miles (Allen) Johnston had six children, a son and then five daughters. The youngest of these, born September 30, 1878, was my great grandmother Eliza. So far as I can determine, she had only the single given name, a variation upon her mother's name which she shared with two sisters – Alice Lizzie and Penelope Elizabeth.

It is believed that Eliza was just two or three months old when their mother died. The two oldest siblings, James and Fanny, had already married, but William Johnston was left with four young daughters, Mariah 9, Alice 8, Penelope (Nellie) 6, and the infant Eliza.

Early in 1880, William married the widow Eliza Stanfield in Austin County, and the Johnston children gained a stepmother and stepsister Fanny. Two years later came the birth of their half brother William Franklin Johnston. Mariah married late in 1883, but when William died in January 1884, the second Mrs. Johnston still had her two children and three stepchildren at home.

Family tradition is that Nellie and Eliza were sent to board for a time at Catholic School (in Columbus or Yoakum by varying accounts) and were afterward raised by their sister Fanny. In 1886, William S. Price, Fanny's husband, applied in Austin County for guardianship of Penelope and Eliza Johnston, which was granted in 1887. The guardianship file for 1889 indicated that Penelope was about to marry, but Eliza still required a guardian. She'd have been about eleven at the time.

May 8, 1894, in Lavaca County, fifteen-year-old Eliza Johnston married Morehouse Latting Hale, son of the widow Mary Elizabeth Helene (Smith) Hale, and her late husband James William Hale. The following March Eliza gave birth to their first child, my grandmother Nellie Gertrude Hale, in Hallettsville. Six more children followed: Willie in 1896, Iva Chester ("Ivy") in 1898, Arthur Leonard in 1899, Leslie Johnston in 1901, Geraldine Elizabeth in 1903, and Marguerite Estelle in 1905. They were living in Yoakum at the time of the 1900 census, and Morehouse was farming.

Sometime between 1905 and 1910, the Hales moved to Houston. In the 1910 census, Morehouse was supporting the family as an ice man. He and Eliza were living on Washington Street with four of their seven children - Willie, Leslie, Geraldine, and Marguerite. Twelve-year-old Arthur was living in Brook Smith, in Harris County, with his recently married cousin, William C. Price and wife Gertrude. Nellie is said to have remained in Lavaca County with grandmother "Lizzie" Hale; it is possible that Ivy remained there too.

There was obviously trouble within the household, for in the spring of 1914, Eliza and Morehouse Hale were divorced in Harris County. He is said to have died in a fire at his boarding house September 10, 1917, and buried at Washington Cemetery. Eliza remarried the following spring. Her daughter Marguerite recalled that the marriage to Harry Farmer took place April 1, 1918, in the First Methodist Church of Richmond, Texas. The couple moved to Wichita, Kansas, where they were still living at the time of Eliza's death in 1949.

Of Eliza's seven children, Willie joined the Navy, married a native of Hawaii, and committed suicide in California (possibly San Francisco) before his mother's death in 1949. Ivy joined the Army, married the day he got out, and with his wife Louise, raised a family of four in Dallas. Arthur and Leslie moved to California in the late 20s or early 30s, raised their families in the greater Los Angeles area, and remained there. Nellie

married Don Chatham in Hallettsville, moved to Houston, and had two sons before the couple divorced in 1931. She and the boys moved to the Los Angeles area, near her brothers, and some years later, in 1940, she married Army Sergeant Arlie "Hank" Henderson. She and Hank lived in La Puente, and they're buried in Whittier nearby. The two youngest of the Hale children, Geraldine and Marguerite, married and stayed in Houston. Gerry first married Erwin Godfrey, and later Elmo Swain; she never had children, but she was a much-loved aunt. Marguerite married Roy Oakes, longtime City Comptroller of Houston, and raised four children, all now deceased. Marguerite and Roy Oakes are buried in Memorial Oaks Cemetery.

When she died in 1949, Eliza Johnston Farmer was returned to Houston for burial at Forest Park, Lawndale. Her obituary from a Wichita newspaper, reads:

"Mrs. Harry Farmer, aged 70, 151 North Meridian, mother of County Commissioner Byron C. Farmer, died Tuesday morning at the home. She was the wife of Harry Farmer, pioneer Wichita realtor.

Mrs. Farmer was born in Hallettsville, Tex., on Sept. 30, 1878 and came to Wichita in 1918 from Houston. She was the former Miss Eliza Johnson before marriage. She was a member of the West Side Christian church and the Order of the Eastern Star.

Besides her husband, at the home, and Commissioner Farmer, of 155 South Evergreen Lane, she is survived by three other sons, Arthur L. Hale, Los Angeles; Leslie J. Hale, San Pedro, Calif., and Ivy C. Hale, Dallas, Texas; three daughters, Mrs. A. O. Henderson, Los Angeles; Mrs. Roy Oakes and Mrs. Saint E. Swain, both of Houston; 15 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held from the Culbertson mortuary chapel at 4 pm Wednesday, with the Rev. O. Ray Burgess, pastor of the West Side Christian church officiating. Burial will be made in Houston, Texas."

I am very grateful to all the descendants of Eliza and Morehouse Hale who have helped in gathering information for our shared family history. Any errors of fact or interpretation are entirely mine, so I heartily welcome corrections and additions.

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