

Johnson

Johnson, John & Mary

Children: Gertrude, Henry, William (Bill), Tom, Edward, John

Hearst Relations: MacEachern (Pearl), Ellis (Gertrude), Killick (Henry)

Johnson, Bill & Jean

Children: Donald, Paul, Marion, Ross

Six in a Tent for the First Winter by Don Johnson

In 1916, during the Great War, John and Mary and their children, Gertrude, Henry and Bill, and Gertrude's baby daughter Pearl, left their home in Watson's Corners (Ottawa Valley), after losing their farm, and moved to the Hearst area. They acquired land on the west bank of the Mattawishkwia River, five miles north of town. Since they arrived too late in the season to build a house, they spent the first winter in a tent with their meagre possessions, enduring great hardships. The following year they built a log home and then started clearing land. Sons Tom, Edward and John came north after the war. Three other children, Jessie, Sophie and Sadie, had already left home before the family moved north.



John Johnson and the original house
at River Farm -1917



Mary Johnson making soap -about 1920

When the Johnsons arrived, there were no roads from the south. The only means of transportation was by train. Times were tough and jobs scarce. The men worked at pulp-cutting, road-building, land-clearing and whatever jobs were available.



Mary and John Johnson -early 1920s

Bill went west and worked in a coal mine in Alberta for a year, mining coal by hand. Bill also worked for the Hudson's Bay Company paddling canoes before returning to Hearst, where he worked for West & Co. for eight years. He lived over the store in order to keep the fires going and used his money to help support his parents on their farm, since they were unable to provide for themselves. Tom became a prospector and discovered Little Long Lac Gold Mine near Geraldton, in 1932, the first producing gold mine in the area. The discovery provided an impetus to other companies to explore and develop prospects. Tom found another gold mine east of Geraldton, which he named Tombill, after himself and his brother. Formed in 1935 and financed by Tom and Percy Hopkins, its ore reserves ran out in 1942.



Tom and Bill Johnson -1930s

Tom lived out his life in Hearst, passing away in 1944.

In 1928, my mother, Jean Alexander, arrived in Hearst. She had trained for missionary nursing after graduating from Toronto General Hospital. However, because of a heart murmur, she was not allowed to be sent to Africa, ending up instead at the United Church Outpost Hospital (St. Paul's), in Hearst. Jean had been raised on a farm near Milton, in southern Ontario, by a staunch Presbyterian father who had selected her to "serve the church." The farm she was raised on is now known as the Kelso Conservation Area, and is located on the north side of the Niagara Escarpment, facing Highway 401. She was a loving mother and a good friend, supporting people in need of medical or compassionate help.



Jean Alexander, nurse in the 1920s

Jean and Bill met in Hearst and were married in Milton, at her father's home. After the wedding, they returned to the north to resume their lives. They had four children, Don, Paul, Marion and Ross. The family lived in Hearst until 1948.

In 1934–35, after making his lucrative gold discoveries, Tom Johnson built a dairy operation on the highway on the east side of town, across from the cemetery. Included in the operation were a dairy barn for the cows with a bunkhouse on the front end, a separate dairy building to pasteurize and bottle milk and a prefab house for the Bill Johnson family to live in. Bill managed the dairy business for Tom during the seven years it was in operation.

Meanwhile, Jean quit her job at St. Paul's Hospital, where she had been a registered nurse, to cook and wash for her own growing family and the four hired men who milked the cows by hand and did the farmwork. A lady from Reesor's Mennonite community was hired to help with the housework.

In 1942, the family, now consisting of three children, Don, Paul and Marion, moved into Hearst and rented a house from Harvey West, until their new home was built next to the Hearst Demonstration Farm (Prince at 11th Street).



House built for Bill Johnson by Ed Larson about 1942



A Tom Johnson designed (to dump forward) land-clearing shovel about 1938 (Paul and Don in front)

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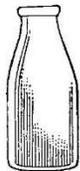
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Tom also purchased a home in Lanark, in eastern Ontario, and moved his elderly parents there, back to the area they had left twenty-six years earlier, and hired his sister Sadie to look after them. Gramma Mary had gone blind from glaucoma and Grandpa John needed looking after.



Emily (Killick) & Henry Johnson -wedding day 1926

Henry Johnson married Emily Killick, an immigrant from England, and they had three children (Jim, Ron and Florence) born in the north before moving to eastern Ontario in 1936. Emily had been working at the hospital in Hearst, and Henry met her when he was a patient. John (Jack) Johnson met his wife Mary, who also worked at St. Paul's Hospital. They married in 1926 and moved to Kapuskasing where he worked at the Government Farm. They raised two daughters, Jean and Beverly. Jean recalls her mother talking about feeding World War I draft dodgers, who arrived in Hearst on the railroad with no money.

Bill and Jean Johnson Family:

In the early 1940s, the Johnson family spent summers at the River Farm, where grandparents John and Mary had lived.



Don and Paul in front of Johnson farm house and looking south towards the highway -1942

Fishing on the Mattawishkwia River was popular with Paul and young Marion. One summer when Don was ten, he spent two weeks there with friends Neil MacEachern and Alvin Martin, while his parents, plus Paul and Marion, visited family in southern Ontario. The boys' jobs included milking the cows, feeding the hens, gathering the eggs and cooking for themselves. Neil had his pony, complete with one-seater racing cart, to get to town. Unfortunately, with no room for riders, he had to travel alone when taking milk to his family in town and bringing back groceries.



Don and Paul and others in 1943 class photo
back: Donald Johnson , Billy Niemi
front: Sam Bosnick , Ted Bosnick , Paul Johnson

About this time, with World War II in full swing, the agricultural representative in Hearst, Bill Montcalm, convinced Bill Johnson that there was a good market for quality seed potatoes. He also suggested that sandy soil would be better for this type of crop than the heavy clays of the River Farm. With this in mind, Bill bought the Gravel Pit Farm, in 1944. The family now spent their summers at the potato farm. With the help of good friends, like Donald Martin and Alf Anderson, Bill built a good-sized root cellar with living quarters above. Rooms were separated by blankets hung from the ceiling. At harvest time, Bill was able to get the HPS principal to allow those boys who wanted to come and pick potatoes. The potatoes were dug with a fan-type digger that threw the potatoes on top of the ground. Jean Johnson had a big job feeding the crew.

In 1948, thirty-two years after arriving in Hearst, and only after Bill had finally been convinced by wife Jean that the family had pioneered long enough, the Johnson family left for a farm on top of the Niagara Escarpment, above and behind where Jean had grown

up. The farm is now part of the Kelso Conservation Area and the former Alexander barns have become the Halton Regional Museum.

American Soldiers in Hearst: After the attack on Pearl Harbour, U.S. soldiers came to Hearst to build a radar station at the gravel pit north of town. It was constructed without nails and made of wood materials pegged together. Several American wives and children followed their soldier husbands to Hearst, but housing was in short supply. The Johnson family took in three American families for a period of time: Dr. Gove from Florida with five small children rented our living room and dining room; the Robinsons, a husband and wife, rented two bedrooms; and the Spennato family rented the other two bedrooms. Our family, the five of us, moved into the heated garage, where beds were lined up side-by-side and divided by blankets for privacy. The other families had hotplates for cooking; however, if a roast was to be cooked, our wood cookstove was used. Our washing machine and clothesline were also shared. There were wonderful compensations—at Christmas, a crate of Florida oranges was received from the Gove family. When the Americans left, new boarders arrived: Miss Murray, the Grade 1 and 2 teacher at HPS; also, the father of one of the hospital managers.

Near Tragedy: When I was four, Dr. Arkinstall had to remove my rotting baby teeth. When I woke up, I remember being in my mother's lap and vomiting blood all over her. "I'm sorry, Mommy," I said, but she surprised me by saying, "It's okay, it's okay." Apparently, I had received too much ether, had stopped breathing and had needed artificial respiration to be revived.

Trail Ranger Camp: The local United Church minister, Doc Smith, organized a trail ranger summer camp for boys at a beautiful clear lake west of Hearst. One of the orderlies from the hospital was a leader with Rev. Smith. Many skills were learned, including swimming, fishing, using an axe and saw, and preparing food. Rules were strict and punishment went according to infraction. For misdemeanors, Doc had what he referred to as Patsy One, which consisted of a board about two feet long with a handle at one end. Patsy Two was longer, and was reserved for more serious offences. For major transgressions, there was the bare hand on the bare bottom. My choice was the bare hand, because if it hurt me it hurt the one applying the discipline as well.

Some of the boys who excelled at camp were rewarded by riding back to Hearst in Doc's Jeep. Doc liked to drive fast, but in order to hide that fact, he turned off the speedometer light when he hit sixty miles per hour. Donald Martin's response on hearing of this trick on the gravel highway was, "The Lord may be with him, but someday he might just leave him on the road."



Tom and Bill Johnson -1930s

