

# *My Life in Montgomery County*

## *Biography of Frank William Johnson*



*By Carolyn Johnson Burns*

*Granddaughter*

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## **History Behind The Man**

**F**rank William Johnson was born on September 23, 1880 in a farm house, five miles north of Dayton, at Shiloh Springs Road and Route 48. He was the second of six children born to Edward Louis Johnson and Sophia Elizabeth (Broxey) Johnson. His great-grandfather, Joseph House Johnson, was a pioneer in Wayne Township. Having left Hampshire County, Virginia in 1806, Joseph traveled by horseback with his wife, Eve (Mary Eve Stoker) and arrived on the banks of the Great Miami River where he erected a cabin at Taylorsville. In 1834, he built the Taylorsville Inn, a welcome stop for hundreds of travelers on the Miami-Erie Canal, and also a gathering point for social events for Wayne Township pioneer families. When the railroad came through, the local stop became known as Johnson's Landing. The historic Inn stood until July 4, 2005 when it burned to the ground.



In the 1820's, Joseph Johnson established the family cemetery, Johnson Cemetery, along Rip Rap Road near Taylorsville. The land was deeded to Joseph from his wife's father, John Stoker. As a young man, Frank took his sons, Arthur, Edward and LeRoy with him to cut the grass and trim around the headstones. The cemetery is located right on the banks of the river, and after heavy rains the cemetery often floods. Over the years, many headstones have been lost to the flood waters.

## **Young Years**

**I**t was shortly after the U.S. Federal Census was recorded in the year 1880 that Frank William Johnson was born, and because the 1890 census was destroyed in a fire, 1900 is the first year Frank appeared on a U.S. Federal Census. At that time he was helping his dad farm in northern Harrison Township, but the call of city life was enticing him. Frank met a young lady of 17 years of age named Edna Catherine Herr, whose father, Thomas Reed Herr, was also a farmer at Little York in nearby Butler Township. On August 27, 1902, Frank and Edna married and took up residence at 44 E. Vincent Street in Dayton.

Being a husky athlete of 6' 5", Frank became quite interested in police work, and on September 26, 1902, was appointed to the Dayton police force. At first he drove a horse patrol, but was later assigned to the position of ambulance driver for one of Dayton's first ambulances.

## Family Life



Treva



Art



Ed



LeRoy

On June 26, 1903, Frank and Edna's first child was born—their only daughter, Treva Eleanor Johnson. In 1904, Frank moved his family to 1315 W. Germantown Street. On December 4, 1905 Frank and Edna's second child arrived – Arthur Ellis Johnson. The following year, 1906, Frank and Edna moved to 73 Rung Street. Frank was well established as one of the strongest members of the Dayton police force, and that year, he received the first reward ever paid to a Dayton police officer for arresting a highway robber. October 17, 1907, a second son was born – Edward Thomas Johnson. Almost nine years later, Frank and Edna's last child, LeRoy Johnson, was born on April 25, 1916.

**Treva**, at age 19, married Leon J. Lauber on May 4, 1921. No children were born to this union. Treva died of cancer on March 25, 1976. Lee died May 30, 1973 of acute coronary disease and diabetes.

**Art**, at age 26, married Dorothy Hoerner on October 1, 1931. To this union three children were born: Richard Arthur Johnson, LeRoy William Johnson, and Donna Rae Johnson. Art died of Tularemia (rabbit fever) on December 8, 1944. Dorothy died in a car accident on March 24, 1957.

**Ed**, at age 24, married Jeannette "Peg" Johnson on July 25, 1931. To this union one child was born, Frank Thomas Johnson. Ed died of coronary disease on September 14, 1973. Peg died of coronary disease on November 16, 1986.

**LeRoy**, at age 29, married Dorothy Reynolds on June 3, 1945. To this union, one child was born, Carolyn Sue Johnson. LeRoy died at the age of 91 on January 15, 2010.

Frank and Edna were still living at the same address, only now the street name had changed from Rung Street to Neal Avenue. In the summer of 1912, Frank's mother, Sophia, died of acute heart disease. She and Edward had been married 34 years.



The year 1913 brought an awful tragedy to Dayton, Ohio—the Great Flood of 1913. The family was fortunate and all survived the great flood. This picture is a view of the back of their white frame house on Neal Avenue during the flood. The book titled *Drenched Uniforms and Battered Badges – How Dayton Police Emerged from the 1913 Flood* by Stephen C. Grismer provides more pictures and documentary of Frank Johnson and the flood.

It was in the house on Neal Avenue where Frank's father, Edward, passed away on May 26, 1927, fifteen years after his wife had died. In addition to Frank, Edward was survived by another son, Perry Johnson, who was floor manager of the Dayton Savings and Trust Company, and a daughter, Mrs. Clara (Johnson) McGraw Woods of Detroit.

### **The "Gangster" Years**

**T**he wild gangster years of the 1930's brought many changes to the police department. In 1930, the police started using armored cars. The crewman alongside the driver was armed with a submachine gun. The trio in the rear had their choice of five rifles, four shotguns and two other machine guns kept in the back seat gun rack. Full-length armored shields also were carried for crew protection outside the car. Frank drove this "land battleship" when it was employed to follow a car carrying members of the desperate John Dillinger gang from the local lockup to the more secure jail in Lima, Ohio. It was an uneventful journey and they returned in the car to Dayton.

In 1934, when new bullet-proof steel shields were added to the equipment of the police department, Frank had the honor of demonstrating the first shield to arrive in Dayton. A picture of him crouching behind a shield appeared in the Dayton Daily News.

After 33 years, Frank retired from the Dayton police force in 1935. But law enforcement was still in his blood, and that same year, he went to work as a Police Guard for the Delco Products Division of General Motors. Frank and Edna moved from 2740 Whittier Avenue to 2102 Titus Avenue.

It was during that time that Frank lost his oldest son, Art. Art and his wife's step-father, Ray Dion, had gone hunting in Adams County on a cold Thanksgiving Day in 1944. They came upon a rabbit that refused to run away, but Art shot it anyway and put it in his hunting coat. Art contracted Tularemia (rabbit fever) from the rabbit and died 11 days later.

Frank continued working at Delco Products until 1949 when, for health reasons, he was forced to retire.

## Golden Age

The year 1952 brought many happy memories. Frank and Edna celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a family gathering near the grape arbor in their backyard on Titus Avenue.



They had several more happy years together when, in 1957, at age 77, Frank became quite ill, suffering with heart disease and diabetes. Frank William Johnson passed away on April 3, 1959, having lived a long full life. Edna stayed in their house on Titus Avenue until she died on June 1, 1961, survived by her three remaining children, Treva, Ed, and LeRoy, and five grandchildren.



## Happy Days



**Ed, Treva, Art**



**Edna and son, LeRoy**



**Edna and Frank**

*Frank William Johnson, Police Officer  
Dayton, Ohio*

Police Department, Dayton, Ohio



FRANK JOHNSON

*Pension*



Police Station, Precinct No. 3

**F**RANK Johnson was born on September 23, 1880, on a farm in Montgomery County, where he was educated in the country school and taught the "whys" and "wherefores" of tilling the soil. He remained on the farm several years with his parents, when the call of the city reached him and he responded by taking up his residence in Dayton. On September 26, 1902, he was appointed to the police force and later assigned to the position of ambulance driver, in which capacity he is now engaged. Mr. Johnson is a Modern Woodman. He has a wife, Edna, and three children, Arthur, Edward and Treva. *L. B. Roy*

*Dayton Daily News - September 12, 1923*  
*Tales of Our Sturdy Cops*



Policeman Frank Johnson won the first reward that was paid to the Dayton force. About 17 years ago he arrested a highway robber and was given the \$25 that was on his head. Johnson took the fugitive in a saloon at Franklin and Perry sts., and a fight followed the capture when two of the prisoner's pals attempted to rescue him from the officer. Johnson was "quick on the draw," however, and with his "trusty" revolver he outwitted the desperados who tried to cheat justice. In those days rewards were not great incentives because

the cops who achieved them by performances of valor received no part of the sum offered; it went into the coffers of the Police Pension Fund. Under the new arrangement the Pension Fund receives half the reward and the arresting officer the other half.

Johnson is recognized as one of the strongest members of the division, and it is told that in a physical contest he is capable of breaking his opponent in two. The husky athlete once caught a burglar in the act of plundering an E. Third street store. The denizen of the night proved to be a brute, who was a bear for punishment, and Johnson tussled with him for a long time before he finally succumbed to the officer's superior strength. After the robber was handcuffed and put into the patrol, he fought with the wagon crew all the way to the stationhouse.

Frank William Johnson was born Sept. 23, 1880 on a farm five miles north of Dayton. He came to this city in 1902 and one month later joined the police force. Johnson has shown himself to be equal to any occasion and has been detailed to execute many hard assignments. For five years he has been driving emergency vehicles and has been involved in but one minor traffic accident. The policeman spends his vacations hunting and fishing. He resides with his family at 73 Neal av.

*Dayton Daily News - May 17, 1934*  
*New Type Bullet-Proof Shield Ordered For Police*



*Caption under picture.*

Peeking from behind one of the new bullet-proof shields to be added to the equipment of the Dayton police department, Officer Frank Johnson is trying to sight a gunman so that he can see if the shield is as good as it is supposed to be. At the right is a side view showing how an officer is completely protected when he crouches.

*Article.*

Bullet-proof steel shields to be carried over the arm, modification of ancient defensive armor, soon will protect Dayton policemen from gangsters' bullets. Several of the shields have been ordered and will be delivered soon.

The shields, authorities claim, offer much more protection than steel vests and have advantages as well. They are hinged and fold into a compact bundle. The hinges permit an officer to sit in an auto and be completely protected, as the lower third of the shield, due to the hinges, covers his lap and the top third protects his thorax and head.

Properly used, the shields turn machine gun and pistol bullets and make the wearer immune from a weapon less than the highest powered rifle bullets.

A peep hole covered with thick glass, also bullet-proof and a small hole through which a gun may be aimed, enable an officer to talk up to a barricaded house or to advance in the face of heavy gunfire without any danger.

Demonstrators at headquarters Thursday exhibited a battered shield, which had been subjected to heavy fire from machine guns and pistols. The shield was dented, but not pierced. The shields, said to be rapidly gaining favor throughout the country, are manufactured by the Federal Laboratories, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pa. The firm also makes Thompson submachine guns, tear gas guns and other police equipment.

Some of the shields will be placed in the armored car and others will be at headquarters for emergencies.

*Dayton Daily News - May 26, 1935*  
*Police Officer, In Department 33 Years, Quits*



Patrolman Frank Johnson, who drove a horse patrol when he joined the force Sept. 26, 1902, and was selected as driver of the armored car when Dayton bankers presented the high-powered, heavily armed auto to the department about four years ago, has retired on service pension.

He was one of the first Dayton officers to drive a motor vehicle when autos began replacing bicycles and horses. In his 33 years of service, Johnson has served as traffic officer, "pounded" beats, rode the emergency trucks and operated the switchboard.

He is married, has four children and lives at 2740 Whittier av., Belmont. Officer B. J. Collins has been assigned as driver of the armored car.