

Jacob and Mary Johnson Family

Submitted in 2015 by: Sylvia Johnson-Christensen-Roderick



In the year 1866, my great-grandfather, Jacob Johnson, and great-grandmother, Mary, along with their two year old son, John, came to America from Christiana (now Oslo), Norway. They lived for four years at Dodgeville, WI. Here my Grandfather, Lewis, was born April 23, 1867 and my great-uncle Edward, was born October 10, 1869.

In 1870, Jacob moved his family to a farm six miles east of Milford, Iowa to a sod house he had built. It had three feet thick walls and two one-sash windows. The roof was made of willows laid on the rafters, then a good layer of wild hay and dirt on top of the hay. In the winter they burned twisted hay for heat. For light they used lard in a dish with a small rag for a wick. Two more boys were born at Milford, Iowa: Martin on October 20, 1872 and Peter on March 3, 1876.

Lewis had the job of herding cattle for at least four years, starting at age nine. He had the habit of reading the Bible while herding the cattle.

In the year 1877, a Brother Peter Hoen came to Jacob and Mary Johnson's home to tell them of the Adventist message. He stayed with them eight days, working in the hay field along with the family during the day and studying the Bible into the evening.

Becoming discouraged with their lack of interest in the studies, he left. After walking only one half mile, he heard a voice say, "Go back!" Brother Hoen knelt down in the ditch and prayed for God's help and then went back. After staying and studying with the family eight days longer, he left again. At the same place in the road he again heard a voice saying, "Go back, go back!" Brother Hoen again knelt down in the ditch, earnestly telling God he couldn't do it alone, but needed His help and then he went back and studied with the family ten more days – this time they finally decided to keep the Seventh-day Sabbath.

My great-grandfather had a terrible struggle giving up the habit of chewing snoose. When the craving seemed overpowering, he would run to the creek and strip bark off the willow trees and chew that until he finally won the battle against the dirty habit!

My great-uncle John had been away when the family studied and he never did join the rest of the family in the church. However, the rest of the family were faithful members of the Seventh-day Adventist church all their lives.

Years later, when my father, Jay Johnson, was in school at Hutchinson Theological Seminary, I think in 1927, one of his teacher's names was Hoen. One Sabbath the Hoens had my father along with other students over for Sabbath dinner. Mr. Hoen's father was visiting them and when his son introduced my father as Jay Johnson from Iowa, the father said, "Johnson – from Iowa ... would you by any chance be related to Jacob and Mary Johnson?" My dad told him, "Why they are my grandparents!" At that, the old man hugged my dad and wept for some time. Then he told the story of the family's conversion, ending with the statement,

"What if I hadn't gone back?"



Sylvia, great-granddaughter of Jacob and Mary Johnson, has been a faithful supporter of MWA – here, in 2009, she visits with Dr. Elmer Martinson, son of one of the two first MWA graduates

Dr. Larry Christensen, son of Sylvia and Dean Christensen and great-great grandson of Jacob and Mary Johnson, is a 1968 MWA graduate and has served as MWA Alumni President



Elder Wayne Andersen, another great-grandchild of Jacob and Mary Johnson, was Bible teacher at MWA for several years

Rue E. Hoen at MWA 1929
His father, Peter L. Hoen, brought the SDA message to the Jacob Johnson family



IF HE HAD NEVER GONE BACK

When a harvest hung in the balance

Harvest Time, August, 1877

Dust rose in swirls from my black boots, clogging my nostrils and coating my eyelashes. The hay that protruded like porcupine quills from my clothes scratched my chest and legs. "Hardheaded Norwegian Lutherans," I mumbled with nearly every step taken since I left Jacob and Mary's farm a half mile down the road.

The past 10 days I had been breaking my back pitching hay in the hot August sun near Milford, Iowa. And I wasn't even a farmer, but a short, stout preacher. Even so, my soft hands, short arms, and broad shoulders had

proved their worth against Jacob and his three boys. My head still felt drowsy from staying up past midnight 10 nights in a row, poring over the Bible, trying to help them see its wonderful truths.

I raised my hand to scratch a sore shoulder blade. Suddenly out of the blue sky, a voice commanded, "Go back, go back." I turned in every direction, but only empty hayfields met my gaze. It was God's voice. I fell to my knees in the ditch beside the road and poured out my heart to Him in prayer.

The frustrations slowly melted as a

peace settled over me. Dusting the dried grass from my knees, I rose to my feet and headed back. Now I saw Jacob and Mary Johnson, not as hardheaded Norwegian Lutherans but as God's children.

A wisp of hay flew past my nose, breaking through my thoughts as I turned up Jacob and Mary's driveway. Their brown mutt came bounding down the drive, announcing my return.

Mary met me at the door with a smile. I returned her smile, dusted off my boots, and put my briefcase in the boys' room where I stayed. There I

BY REBECCA LOUISE STOUT

bowed my head to whisper, "Father, I'm back to try again. Work through me to win these souls."

Eight days later my feet plodded down the same dusty road again. This time all the Norwegian jokes I had ever heard were ringing in my head, punctuated by "hardheaded Norwegian Lutherans, nothing but hard-

went to the kitchen. A squeal came from her lips as she bounded back into the room. "Jacob, he's right! Jacob, he's right!" Her finger pointed to Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

Jacob arose, deep in thought. The boys sat on the edge of the sofa, awaiting the outcome. Jacob bowed his head as he spoke. "The preacher's

young or spry as I used to be, but my love for Thee is just as strong."

The door swung open. My son entered the room, smiling. A young man came in with him. "Father, I would like you to meet a student of mine, Jay Johnson from Iowa."

Memories flashed into my mind. "Johnson, Johnson; Iowa, Iowa. Could you be related to Jacob and Mary Johnson from Milford, Iowa?"

The young man stood a little taller and exclaimed, "Why, yes. I'm their grandson." Tears blinded my eyes as I walked over to the young man. Embracing him, I prayed, "Oh, Lord, what if I'd never gone back!"

* * * * *

Peter L. Hoen, the minister who studied with Jacob and Mary Johnson, lived to be 101 years old (1838-1939). Working as a self-supporting preacher, he raised up the Ruthven and Milford churches during 1876 and 1877 in northwest Iowa. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1878.

The Johnsons and five other families met for Sabbath services in their homes. In 1887 an acre of land six and a half miles east of Milford was donated, and a year later a church was built there. (This Terrill congregation merged in 1966 with the Spencer, Iowa, church.)

Jacob and Mary had four children, 15 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren, 101 great-great-grandchildren, 49 great-great-great-grandchildren, and one great-great-great-great-grandchild. From this family came numerous church workers—five ministers, nurses, doctors, five missionaries, and many literature evangelists, teachers, departmental workers, and secretaries—and a host of lay members who have faithfully supported God's cause with their talents and income. Jacob and Mary supported God's work from their 160 acres of farmland. Today their offspring support this work from their more than 10,000 acres. □

Rebecca Louise Stout will be a senior student in nursing at Union College in September.

July 17, 1986
ADVENTIST REVIEW

Jacob, I know it just like you do. It wouldn't seem fitting to have our Bible saying something we didn't keep."

headed Norwegian Lutherans." Then I heard the voice again: "Go back, go back, go back!" I stumbled to my knees. As I prayed I knew I could not leave Jacob and Mary until they accepted God's message. I arose and retraced my steps to the farm again.

Ten days later, as Mary placed the last of the supper dishes in the cupboard, Jacob called her to join us. Entering the room, she walked past the boys and seated herself on the sofa beside Jacob. As I lifted my hand to adjust the flickering lamp, I prayed, "Lord, please let them see Thy true light."

I invited Jacob to ask the Lord to bless us as we studied His Word. The farmer bowed his head. "Heavenly Father," he prayed, "we thank Thee for this day. And now, may Thy Spirit be with us as we seek Thy word." When we had first started studies Jacob didn't even close his eyes when I prayed. Now he himself offered the prayer.

I felt God's Spirit flow through me as I retold the story of salvation and then moved into the Sabbath message, recounting how Jesus kept the Sabbath, explaining how the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week.

I asked Mary to bring in the calendar. She arose from Jacob's side and

right about the Sabbath; on the calendar it's as clear as water. He's also right about the 10 percent tithe, and not eating pork or smoking and drinking." Then he looked at his wife. "Mary, I would never ask you to change your faith or teach the boys anything but what you thought best. But the preacher has convinced me that what he had to say is all true. I'm going to become one of those Seventh-day Adventists. Nothing could please me more than for you and the boys to take that stand beside me."

Silence filled the room as all eyes looked to Mary. The calendar slipped from her hands as tears flowed from her eyes. "Jacob, I know it just like you do. It's all there in black and white in our own Bible. It wouldn't seem fitting to have our Bible saying something we didn't keep."

Jacob arose and gathered Mary and the boys into his arms.

Tears streamed down my face. "Thank You, Lord," I prayed.

Hutchinson, Minnesota, October, 1927

Sun filtered in through the window blinds. I sat on the sofa in my son's living room. "Lord," I prayed, "I thank Thee for the Sabbath, even if I wasn't able to attend church today. I'm not as