

Getting to Know Patrick Alford

Submitted by James "JJ" William Johnson, AAFA #1189

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The following is an article entitled "Patrick Alford, a.k.a. James William Johnson, and His Wives: Janie, Dempsey and Rosa." It was first published in 2002 in the West Line Outlook, a family newsletter for the friends and families of West Line, Arkansas. It was written by Patrick Alford's great grandson, James "JJ" William Johnson and may be published by permission on the AAFA web site and/or their publication, AAFA ACTION.

Patrick Alford, a.k.a. James William Johnson, and his wives: Janie, Dempsey and Rosa

The son of Robert F. Alford and Alsa Evans, Patrick Alford was born on 20 Jul 1860 in Macoupin Co., IL (Palmyra Township) near Carlinville and died on 24 May 1934 in Sevier Co., AR (De Queen) at the age of seventy-three. He was buried at the West Line Cemetery in the county of his death.

Robert and Alsa Alford had eleven children. The first three, William Thomas "Tom," Sarah Elizabeth "Sissy," and George Mashack "Zack" were born in eastern Tennessee. The remaining eight, including Patrick, were born in Macoupin Co., IL near Carlinville.

Before his second birthday, his sister, Rachel Rebecca "Becky," was born. When he was four, his sister, Susan Isabelle "Belle," was born and, at the age of five, another sister, Alsa Eveline "Evie," was born. While eight years old, his brother, Robert Henry "Bob," was born.

Although he was born too late to be counted in the 1860 U.S. Federal Census, he was enumerated with his family in the 1870 Census in Macoupin Co., IL at the age of nine.

When he was ten years old, his brother, Charles Parks "Charlie," was born and when he was twelve, his sister, Minnie Louella, was born.

Two years later, in 1875, his maternal grandfather and probably his namesake, Patrick Henry Evans, died in Tennessee at the age of seventy-three. In the same

year, a sister and the last child born to Robert and Alsa, Ida May, was born. Sometime during the next two years, the family migrated to Tarrant Co., TX near Arlington.

In August of 1877, Patrick was seventeen years old and his younger brother, Charlie, died. The traditionally accepted cause of his death was snake bite.

On 02 Aug 1879, Patrick became involved in a shootout in which George H. White and William "Bill" Lytle were killed. On 26 Sep 1879, the Grand Jury of Tarrant Co., TX sent down an Indictment against Patrick Alford, aka "Mace" and his brother, Zack, for murder. Patrick, who was only nineteen, and Tom, his older brother, went into hiding. Later that year, Zack was convicted of murder and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary.

In 1880, part of the family, including Mace's mother, Alsa, returned to their roots in Roane Co., TN. The children who accompanied her were probably Evie, Bob, Minnie and Ida. Later in that same year, Zack's conviction for murder was overturned in the Texas Court of Appeals.

In 1881, Patrick's sister, Minnie Louella died in Roane Co., TN at the age of eight; Ida May, another sister, died in 1883 at the age of seven. It is believed that they died of influenza.

Sometime during the next few years, Patrick began

to use the name James William Johnson. He bought land and settled in Sevier Co., AR near Ultima Thule in the West Line community. On 10 Sep 1885, Patrick, who was by then called Jim, married Sarah Jane Anderson in Pemiscot Co., MO (Caruthersville). Jim was twenty-five and Sarah Jane was twenty-four.

Born on 13 Mar 1861, Janie received a letter from her sister, Susie, from Caruth, MO, a community south of Kennett, MO. When Janey and Jim married, she resided in Pemiscot Co., MO at the home of her brother.

On 24 Dec 1887, Patrick's father, Robert F. Alford, was brutally murdered in Burleson Co., TX near Caldwell. He was buried somewhere in Texas.

On 18 Jun 1892, Charles Parks Johnson, their first child, was born to Jim and Janie in West Line, Arkansas. On 13 May 1895, their second child, Murray California was born in the same location. In January of 1897, their third child, Ida Pearl, was born but died soon after. She was buried at the West Line Cemetery. There is some evidence to suggest that Janie suffered from depression.

On 25 Jun 1897, the following article appeared in the *De Queen Bee*, a local weekly newspaper:

"Jim Johnson and R.J. Johnson of Ultima Thule, the former a leading stockman and the latter a prosperous farmer, were in the city on business last Saturday."

Ultima Thule was a small community near the West Line area. At that time, the name "West Line" was not applied to their community and Ultima Thule was the closest one so they were considered to be residents around Ultima Thule. This community was on the road going into the Oklahoma Indian Territory and is a latin phrase meaning "the end of the world." This frontier land was a perfect place to begin a new life.

On 30 Jun 1897, Janie applied for and was granted a specific Brand for the Johnson stock. Six months later, on 27 Jan 1898, Janie purchased lands in the West Line area from J.S. Lake. It may be that the purchase of lands in her name and the application for livestock brands in her name was done to keep her husband, who was wanted in Texas for the murder of George H. White, under a low profile. At the very least, if something happened and Jim Johnson was arrested, Janie could carry on with family business because these elements were assigned to her name.

On 10 Nov 1898, Janie gave birth to her fourth child, Elsie Jane. However, Janie could not survive

complications surrounding the birth and was buried at the West Line Cemetery near her daughter, Ida Pearl.

Janie died after thirty-seven years, two hundred forty-two days. She and Jim were married for thirteen years, sixteen days. At her death, Charles Parks was six years old; Murray California was three years old and Jim was thirty-eight years old.

Elsie Jane, an infant, was taken to Tarrant Co., TX near Arlington where she was nursed by Jim's younger sister, Rachel Rebecca Alford-McFadin. She may have remained in Texas for as long as three years.

The following epitaph was placed on Janie's burial marker:

Sarah J. Wife of James W. Johnson
Born Mar 13, 1861
Died Nov 10, 1898

A loving wife, A mother dear
A faithful friend Lies burried here.

JOHNSON

Janie had a sister whose name was Susie and a brother whose name was R.N. Anderson. According to the birth certificate of her daughter, Elsie Jane, the only occupation practiced by Janie was that of a domestic housewife.

Although some records indicate that Janie's surname was Duncan or Donovan, evidence shows that it was Anderson. In later years, her son, Murray California Johnson, would travel to Caruthersville, MO to "visit family." It is believed that it was the family of his mother, Janie, he visited.

Based on family history, in the spring of 1899, Jim approach the homestead of a neighbor in the West Line community whose name was Henry Dempsey Clark. Jim told Clark that he wanted to marry his twenty-four year old daughter, Dempsey Tennessee. Clark reminded Jim that there was a significant age difference between Jim and Dempsey; Jim was thirty-eight years old. "However," Clark explained, "if you will wait one year and Dempsey is willing, I will allow the marriage."

Jim told Clark that he needed a wife and mother for his children now, not a year from now."

At that, Dempsey, who had been listening from inside the cabin, stepped out to tell her father that she would marry Jim immediately. On 01 Mar 1899, Dempsey Tennessee Clark and James William Johnson were married in a religious ceremony in Sevier Co., AR (De Queen). Officiating the wedding was a mysterious

minister whose name was Robert Alford.

The daughter of Priscillar and Henry Dempsey Clark, Dempsey Tennessee Clark was born on 10 Sep 1874 in Louisiana, probably New Orleans, and died on 24 Jun 1914 in Sevier Co., AR (West Line) and was buried in the West Line Cemetery in the county of her death.

Dempsey's parents were from Mississippi and she had three older siblings: Sarah, Lucretia and Jesse. Sarah Clark was born in 1853 in Mississippi and married W.F. Ward in 1880; Lucretia Clark was born in 1858 in Mississippi and married Louis Jones; W. Jesse Clark was born on 23 Sep 1871 in Mississippi and died on 01 Apr 1894 in Sevier Co., AR (West Line) at the age of twenty-two. He was buried at the West Line Cemetery in the County of his death.

On 05 Apr 1900, Jim and Dempsey had their first child of six, Lois Dempsey Johnson. In that same year, Jim, Dempsey, Charlie and Murray were enumerated in the 1900 U.S. Federal Population Census for Sevier Co., AR (Buckhorn Township).

In the latter part of that year, a commercial photograph was made of the children, including: Charlie, Murray, Jane and Lois. The next year another family photograph, not including Jim, was made (see photo on next page). Except on rare occasions, Jim seldom allowed himself to be photographed.

Jim paid real estate taxes in 1901 and 1902 in Sevier County, AR.

On 15 Jul 1902, a son, Timmie Toy Johnson, was born to Jim and Dempsey. In the same year, the family moved to a larger home in Chapel Hill, near De Queen, Arkansas.

On 19 May 1903, Jim bought land from the U.S. Government and on 11 Oct 1904, another son, Robert Henry Johnson, was born to Jim and Dempsey. On 13 Mar 1905, Jim bought more land from the Government and on 11 Sep 1906, a daughter, Allie Mae Johnson, was born.

In 1907, a family portrait in front of the old homestead was made. It included Jim, Dempsey, Charlie, Murray, Jane, Lois, Toy, Allie Mae and Robert Henry. (See photo on next page).

On 16 Oct 1909, Geraldine Verna Johnson was born and on 16 Aug 1912, Pompie Franklin Johnson was born to Jim and Dempsey.

In 1910, the family was enumerated in the Population Census. Named were James William Johnson, Dempsey Tennessee Clark-Johnson, Lois Dempsey Johnson, Timmie Toy Johnson, Robert Henry Johnson, Allie Mae Johnson, Geraldine Verna Johnson, Charles Parks Johnson, Murray California Johnson,



Left to right: Elsie Jane, Murray California, Charles Parks and Lois Dempsey Johnson.

Elsie Jane Johnson and Dempsey's mother, Priscillar Clark.

On January 22, 1913, the Assistant County Attorney of Tarrant County, Texas appeared before the 7th District Court of that county and moved that the charges against Mace Alford, a.k.a. James William Johnson, be dismissed because there was insufficient evidence available to support a conviction. Jim had lived for thirty-four years with George H. White's 1879 murder charge hanging over his head and he had kept his past a secret from the rest of the family.

In the summer of 1914, Dempsey was taking a packed lunch to Jim who was working in one of his fields. During the trip, her buggy hit a tree stump and threw her out of the vehicle. The fall broke her neck and she died three days later on 24 Jun 1914 in De Queen, Arkansas at the age of thirty-nine. Jim and Dempsey were married for fifteen years, eleven days



Left to right: Elsie Jane, Charlie Parks, Dempsey Tennessee, Murray California and Lois Dempsey Johnson.

and had six children. She was buried at the West Line Cemetery in Sevier Co., AR (West Line). Inscribed on her burial marker was the following:

Dempsey T. wife of James W. Johnson
Born Sept. 10, 1874
Died June 24, 1914
Ab 39 yrs 9 mos 4 das

A Precious one From us has gone
A voice we loved Is stilled
A place is vacant In our home
Which never can Be filled
God, in his wisdom Has recalled
The Boon his love has given
And though the body Slumbers here
The soul is safe In heaven

JOHNSON



Upper left to right: Murray California, Dempsey Tennessee, Charles Parks, Elsie Jane, James William (Patrick Alford), Lower left to right: Lois Dempsey, Timmie Toy, Allie Mae and Robert Henry Johnson.

When Jim was almost fifty-four years old, his first grandchild, James Howard Johnson, was born on 11 July 1914 in Jim's home at Chapel Hill. Howard was the son of Charles Parks (Parker) Johnson and Myrtle Lee Cassil.

In 1916, Jim's second grandchild, Charles Parker Johnson, Junior was born in Wichita, Kansas.

On 16 Feb 1917, Jim applied for and received a "JW" stock brand in Sevier County, Arkansas.

With Dempsey gone, Jim employed a Sevier County woman, Rosa Ellen Ayers, to help with his children. Rosa was married to Charlie Ferguson and they had two daughters, Willie Lee and Irene Francis. But because Rosa was spending so much time at the Johnson household, on 24 Jul 1918, Jim was indicted by the county for illegal cohabitation, a charge that was eventually dismissed because no witnesses would come forward to testify.

On 24 Nov 1918, Jim's mother, Alsa Evans-Alford died in Roane Co., TN (Harriman) at the age of eighty-six. She was buried at the Bowman-Bowers Cemetery in the county of her death.

In 1920, Jim and his children were enumerated in the U.S. Federal Census for Sevier County, Arkansas.

In that same year, Jim's son, Charles Parker Johnson was injured in a train accident in which his chest was crushed. Two years later, on 10 Apr 1922, Charles died of pneumonia in Wichita, Kansas at the age of twenty-nine. Jim brought his son's body back to Sevier County and buried him at the West Line Cemetery near his mother and sister.

At the age of sixty-three, Jim married his long

housekeeper and friend, Rosa Ellen Ayers in a civil ceremony in McCurtain Co., OK (Idabel) on 06 Sep 1923.

The daughter of Martha Jane Pollard and William Baker Ayers, Rosa was born on 06 Jul 1893 in Arkansas and died on 23 Jun 1983 in Cottle Co., TX (Paducka) at the age of eighty-nine. She was buried at the East Mound Cemetery in Motley Co., TX (Matador).

On 03 Apr 1924, Jim and Rosa's only child, James Harris Johnson, was born in De Queen, Arkansas.

On 31 Jul 1927, his sister, Rachel Rebecca Alford-McFadin died in Tarrant Co., TX (Arlington) at the age of sixty-five. She was buried at the Watson Cemetery in the county of her death.

In 1928, Jim's older sister, Sarah Elizabeth Alford-Murray died in Tarrant Co., TX (Arlington) at the age of seventy-one. She was buried at the Watson Cemetery in the county of her death.

Jim was enumerated in the 1930 Population Census in Sevier Co., AR (De Queen) with his wife, Rosa, and their child, James Harris.

Many grandchildren were born to James, the last one before his death in 1933.

On 24 May 1934, Jim died of lobar pneumonia in De Queen, Arkansas after a six day illness at the age of seventy-three. He was buried at the West Line Cemetery in the county of his death. The following was inscribed on his burial marker:

J. W. JOHNSON
July 20, 1860
May 24, 1934

At Rest

Rosa, his wife of ten years, was forty years old. Patrick Alford, a.k.a. James William Johnson, had four brothers, six sisters, three wives, six sons, five daughters, thirty-four known grand children, seventy-four known great grand children, seventy-nine known great great grand children and eight known great great grand children. The descendants of James William Johnson number over three hundred.

By those who knew him, Jim has been described as a stern, respected and, in some cases, a feared man.

That he was capable of violence seems clear. However, his authoritative character was often softened to a loving and protective one. He enjoyed a sense of humor and community pride.

James William Johnson was, above all, a family man and pioneer. Saddled with a secret life, faced with inescapable tragedies and confronted with demanding responsibilities, Jim shouldered, with determination, those things required of him.

He was a man of pride and the father of several generations of proud children.

Rosa Ellen Ayers, his widow, took her son, James Harris, and moved to Motley Co., TX (Matador) in 1935. Some time after that, she married Walter E. Ellithorp, who died in 1956.

She saw the birth of several grandchildren by her son, Harris.

On 23 Jun 1983, Rosa died of cardiac arrest in Paducka, Texas at the age of eighty-nine and was buried in the East Mound Cemetery in Motley Co., TX (Matador). There is no evidence that either of her daughters, Willie Lee Ferguson and Irene Francis Ferguson, ever had offspring.