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HOW DOES ELSA ALLEAN NEWTON'S "HISTORY" INDICATE THAT JIM JOHNSON WAS PATRICK ALFORD?

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Allean Newton's "History" is a four page handwritten manuscript on legal size paper. A cousin, Ema McFadin, found it in Allean's home after Allean's death, and it remains in Ema's custody.¹

It is believed that Allean was the author of the document because only two people lived in the home for many years. One person was Allean's mother, Belle Alford (Newton), and Allean herself. We know Belle didn't write it, though she may have contributed to it, because the document gives Belle's death date; something Belle could not have written.² The entire document is written in one style of handwriting, so it is reasonable to believe that Allean wrote it.

The document has several headings like: "Mamas Mother", "Grandma's Family", "Papas Mother", "R.H. Alford", "Murray Johnson's Children", and "Jim Johnson's Family".

A comparison of a line of information on the first page under the "Mamas Mother" heading to a line of data on the fourth page under the heading "Jim Johnson's Family" reveals that the author of this document believed that Patrick "Paddy" Alford was James "Jim" Johnson.

On page one of the "History" document, the name "Paddy Alford" was written, and on the same line was

the date: 5/24/34. On page four, the name "Jim Johnson" was written, and on the same line the word "died" and the date: 5/24/34 was written.

The dates are identical, and the date, 24 May 1934, was the death date of James William "Jim" Johnson, also known as Patrick "Paddy" Alford.³ There appears to be a few glitches in the consistency of Allean's history, however the accuracy of this comparison makes clear the author's position on the identity of Jim Johnson.⁴

How reliable is this record? This is an important issue since this document *directly* answers the question, "Who was Jim Johnson?" In most schools of historical or genealogical thought, this information might be categorically named as substantial evidence. It would certainly be labeled relevant, though, from some perspectives, inadequate.

Inadequacies occur in an evidence train when other portions of the information provided from a source are suspect or known to be inaccurate. When this record is carefully studied, it becomes clear that some information does not reconcile to other reliable data. For example, on page one, the children of Robert and Alsa Alford are enumerated. Below this list is a statement: "Children all born in Carlinville, Illinois." ⁵

We know that Tom, George, and Sarah Alford were born in Tennessee, not Illinois. Patrick Alford was the first child to be born in the Carlinville, Illinois area.

Other errors occur, like the death date of Tom Alford lying on the line below his name, which lists George Alford.⁶ These types of mistakes are unintentional and reflect the author's best efforts to report her knowledge.

But what about her comparison of Jim Johnson and Patrick Alford? There is no ambiguity in this part of the record. Although it is impossible to know Allean Newton's intention regarding this issue, its substantial value is unequivocal.

At issue is one important question: Was our informant in a position to witness or know with clarity Jim Johnson's true identity? She was certainly alive in 1934 when Johnson died, and since her mother was Johnson's sister, she had ample opportunity to learn why her uncle, Jim Johnson, was not using her mother's maiden name, which was Alford.

Since her participation with this information was firsthand, the evidential value could be elevated to that of a primary source. The information provided in Allean's *History*, in its original form, might make it a non-derivative source, and as stated above, its relevance is clearly submittable.

From this analysis, the document has an reasonable value in ascertaining the true identity of Jim Johnson as Patrick Alford.

ENDNOTES

¹ Elsa Allean Newton Manuscript "History", dates ranging from 1864 to 1960, handwritten record, Pages 1-4; privately held by Ema Jane McFadin, [address for private use], Arlington, Texas. Provenance: Elsa Allean Newton, Ema Jane McFadin, photocopy in possession.

² Elsa Allean Newton Manuscript "History", dates ranging from 1864 to 1960, Page 1.

³ Walnut Grove Cemetery Marker (Sevier County Arkansas), James W. Johnson; photograph taken by Holly D. Winegardner (Johnson), 15 July 1998.

⁴ Elsa Allean Newton Manuscript "History", handwritten record, Pages 1, 4.

⁵ Elsa Allean Newton Manuscript "History", dates ranging from 1864 to 1960, Page 1.

⁶ Ibid.