

# Pioneer Roots of Pinellas

## THE JOHNSON FAMILY

Captain Charles Wharton Johnson and his wife and children lived in Cedar Key, Florida. The Captain had a contract to carry the mail by ship from Cedar Key south to various points as far as Fort Myers. His son Levin assisted his father in the operation of the ship "The Evening Star". On one of these trips (1870) the ship was wrecked in a violent storm off Little Pass, Clear Water Harbor. Observers on the bluff saw the ship in distress and went out and rescued the Capt. and Levin.

Captain Johnson took time to look over the area here on the central part of the peninsular and was impressed by what he saw. He was particularly attracted to the high bluff in the section that is now Belleair. Planning to bring his family here to live he completed residence requirements and took out homestead papers on the property where the Belleview-Biltmore now stands.

The family consisting of the Captain, his wife, sons Levin, George and Louis and their daughters Lela and Lottie moved and built a house at that location. He then resumed his trade up and down Florida's West Coast. His ships, The Evening Star was a 8 ton ship powered entirely by its canvas sails and The Morgan was a 15 ton 40 ft. sail-powered vessel. Their youngest child Charles Powell Johnson was born Dec. 27, 1872 here in Pinellas.

Captain Johnson later bought land on the west side of Big Lake, later to be known as Lake Largo. They moved their Citrus trees and later the Captain built a three story house near where the Taylor Packing House stood or where today the new Largo Park at East Bay Drive and Seminole road is located.

His land was used for many things - at one time a slatted pinery was located where the Fairgrounds were on East Bay Drive and also a Rice Mill was located near by. As his children grew each one was given acreage for a home to be used for their agricultural pursuits.

The youngest child, Charles Powell married Cecelia Dieffenwierth and there were two children born. Jesse W. and Kathryn. Powell [ the family always used his middle name] wanted to enter the ministry and this part of the family moved to Cincinnati where he entered Bible College. While they were in Cincinnati the third child was born, a boy named Timothy. Just before they were to return to Florida, Powell and his daughter Kathryn contracted Black Measles. When they recovered Cecelia and the children headed home by train. Powell and some companions decided to do some sightseeing on the way home. At the Tennessee River they went for a swim - apparently Powell was not fully recovered and he developed a sore throat and cold. It turned into "galloping consumption" as tuberculosis was called in those days and altho he made it back to Largo he died in six months. He was 27 years old in 1909. Six months after his death his youngest daughter Mary was born.

Captain Charles died in 1907 and his wife died in 1911. All of Powell Johnson's children remained in Pinellas. The two boys Jesse and Timothy operated Seminole Nurseries, developed Sylvan Memorial Park and a similar one in Sarasota and have further engaged in various real estate and banking interests.

Mary the youngest married Plangon and remained here. Kathryn married Ted Wilcox and she served as principal of South Ward Elementary School for many years.

Excerpts from the Clearwater Sun Thursday, May 29, 1980, by: Kathryn Johnson Wilcox.

### The Johnson Family 1907

From Left, Front Row, Capt. Charles Wharton Johnson, Catharine Kurtz Johnson, Levin Johnson.

Back Row, Lela Catharine Johnson, Charlotte Kurtz Johnson Barker, Louis Steele Johnson, George Ward Johnson, Charles Powell Johnson.

