

Orleans County Historical Association

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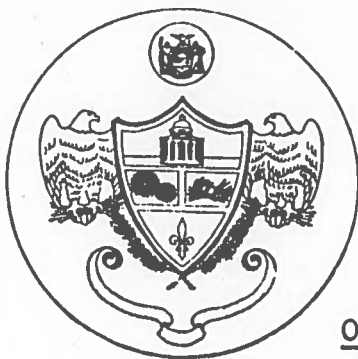
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Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

Rev. Johnnie Johnson
400 West Oak Orchard Street
Medina, New York

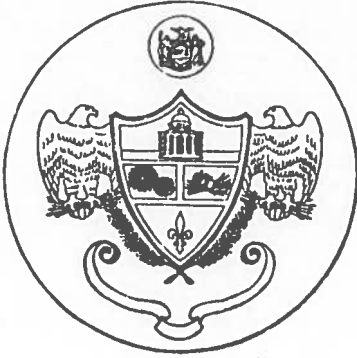
Johnnie Johnson was born in Okhumpka, Florida Feb. 25, 1918.

Mr. Johnson is interviewed by Arden (Mac) McAllister and
Helen McAllister in their home in Medina.

J Rev. Johnnie Johnson

Mc Arden (Mac) and/or Helen McAllister





Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Johnny Johnson
Signed

Feb. 23, 1978

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Alden R. McAllister / Helen McAllister

INTERVIEWER

Feb. 23, 1978

Date

For the Orleans County Historical Association, February 23, 1978, REV. JOHNNIE JOHNSON of Medina, New York, is being interviewed by Arden and Helen McAllister of Medina.

J I was born in the state of Florida in a place called Okhumpka in the year 1918 on February the 25th. That was the time, I guess, at the end of World War I. Okhumpka is the county seat of Lake County. There was three in our family. My mother was named Alberta Johnson. My mother had two brothers. One named Robert Johnson and the other Elias Johnson. I was the oldest one of my mother's childs, the first born. There was another, and a sister named Fannie Lee. My father was named Johnnie Johnson, Sr. My father was a hotel cook in Okhumpka, Florida. My father, I was told that he died, passed away, when I was five years old.

I didn't start school until I was six years old. My mother then would carry me to school. Well the first day I went to school, she had to walk me to school because the school was actually in a church. A little church house that had one room. During those years, Mac, the building was just board seats. They was made out of wood, seats, you know. Old, long, wooden seats; they got old wooden pews today, and one stove in the center, a wood stove. The school year term then was only four months. You'd go to school only four months. And I can remember that after the first year I went to school it was not like it is now. And the pupils was in the same room whether he was in first, second or third grade. You were in the same room; the same classroom. Later years I moved up from there and went to a larger church where they had more room and they had a larger building. So we went to a

much larger building. And that was about a quarter of a mile we had to walk. So after the third grade, I believe if my memory serves me right, we then had six months school term. It never did go to eight or nine months, not in that area, because the population of the Negro was at that time was about 150 people that lived in that area.

My next move was after I finished the sixth grade. The only place that I could go to school then was about seven miles. And going then, we didn't have any transportation of any sort. The people didn't have automobiles and anyone that did have one was maybe three or four miles from me. You didn't have nothing but a horse and buggy in those days. You had little of the amenities that we would ride. We would go to these places, seven miles, just on mules and wagons. We would go to Temple. That was the next town to Okhumpka. So we would go there to meeting once a month. And a funny thing about it, we would - - - my mother would buy meat. There was a man, I'll never forget this, he used to come by in an old wagon. And he would always come by and my mother would always go out to the wagon and he would sell her meat; he had the scales on the wagon. It was fresh meat, you know. You'd go out; and this was something, I think about sometimes, now, how my mother used to go out and he'd cut the meat and weigh it. Give it to her. She'd buy ham, anything, any kind of meat, fresh meat, they'd have it on the wagon, throw it back up there.

Mc Did they have ice ?

J No. He didn't have ice. He had something like; I don't know whether you know what I am talking about or not, but it's like - - - palmetto. Have the meat laying on palmetto straw like. I don't know whether you know what it is. If you ever go to Florida you will see it. It is like a palm tree. You'd cut the leaves and you'd have it spread out - - - spread the meat out on that. And he'd have it in his wagon and he'd go around and he'd ring a bell and,

you'd know he'd sell meat. His name was old man Fussel.

Well, I didn't go to Leesburg to school. The closest relatives I had where I could go to finish school was in Gainsville, Florida. That was in Alachua County, which is the County seat. Later in the year, my mother told me that if I got good grades, that I could go stay with my aunt. That was on my father's side; my father's sister.

... Mac, I want to pause a little bit and tell you something. You know after we leave our home - - my mother moved about three miles away from where I was going to school. That was quite a ways to go back and forth to school; about three miles. And during the course of this, well, naturally I had some work, some chores to do after school.

Well, after school term was over I had to get a job. I got a job when I was nine years old, working in the field. This job that I had was planting watermelons, tomatoes and when bean season comes along, I worked out then going to my uncles down in Sunnyhill. That's about twelve miles from where we lived. So by going there during the bean season I would live with them and pick beans. He was a farmer. I'll never forget that! I never will forget this. This was in the thirties. He had a team of horses, and he had trucks, and he was a pretty good liver; what I mean, as a farmer. What happened was the bank closed up. All the banks closed up, and he came home one night, I'll never forget this. (pause here as he remembers his uncle speaking). "You know, we don't have a thing but what you see out there in the field". He said to me, "The bank closed up and went bankrupt, and we don't have anything!" He lost his horses and his mules and all farm equipments 'cause he couldn't pay. This was a terrible time for the people. And then came - I don't know whether you remember this or not - but those years they called them Mediterranean flies. They was bad for the oranges, you know. And the President; I'll never forget. Hoover was the President during those years, and he had everybody who had any fruit, to cut down the trees. Well, in those days we had what you call guava trees. You make jelly out of the guava fruit. A

lot of people during those days would have these trees and in fact they would gather the guava and guava seeds in the season and they would make jellies. But they had inspectors to come down and tell you to "cut them down". And you'd cut down your trees. And people that had oranges, they had to get rid of them or pull the oranges off the tree because they couldn't sell them. That was horrible. People that had any kind of fruit had to get rid of it.

Mc And this was because of the Mediterranean fly and trying to get rid of it?

J Wipe it out! The California oranges was selling. Someone said that Hoover owned a lot of property in California and he was having people down south in Florida getting rid of their oranges. President Hoover was selling his California fruit. I remember that very well. So, we survived. All of us survived, and all these are the things I was really concerned about.

When I worked out in the fields, I remember this well, I got fifty cents a day. That means that when I left in the morning I couldn't see the house. And when I came back at night I couldn't see the house... I often think about how the young people today are really blessed. Blessed by what I can see today. I used to work for fifty cents a day, working all day long, carrying one sandwich a day. One sandwich. I did the work and I came back.

Mc How about your drinking water? Was that given to you in the field?

J How we got water was down at a little place where a man dug a hole and the water would come up, spring up. We'd find this spring water. You know right now they wouldn't allow you to - well, I guess it was sanitary. The water would keep running off... and that's where you got your drinking water.

It was too far, Mac. It was too far for you to come home overnight. I mean - well, when I was kind of grown up as a teen, I'd come home. I was staying at the log cabin, and still on the farm because it was too far to walk back and forth. And we would stay over, would stay there for five days and work. We had to eat and sleep in the same place. In the same place, we had to lay down. We cooked. Of course

we did a little better than that. We would mostly cook our food outside instead of inside. But sometimes when it rained you had to have a place where you could cook inside. We were a little fortunate though, to have everything prepared. I can see that now.

We'd have to plant what you'd call new ground. When I say "new ground", I mean you take an axe and cut a tree a foot and a half around. You cut it down to the ground. You'd cut acres of this stuff for the contractors. We got \$75.00 an acre. It would take you months to clear the new ground. While you pile it and burn it and when you could, you'd plant it. This new ground means you'd have new ground to plant watermelons and corn and whatever. You'd stay right there of course. You'd be too tired when you got done during the day. You'd be too tired to do anything else. And you'd contract that for \$75.00 !! And I never forget; we had some that would take you a month. Seventy-five dollars, and this had to be divided among four people.

After going through the hard, real hard years, I decided to continue to go to school. My mother decided to let me go and live with my aunt in Gainesville. I'd hitch-hike a ride there because I didn't have money to travel . I would catch a log truck and maybe go 17 miles; catch another truck and go as far as it was going, and hitch-hike. That's the way you got where you was going. So, after I arrived in Gainesville (my aunt knew I was on my way). Of course I let her know when I got down that my mother knows I arrived. I arrived there about a month before school. So, after I arrived in Gainesville my aunt told me that I could get a job and work in the night and go to school in the day. I didn't know how I was going to do this, but I did. It was during the Depression times. I could see people standing by for shoes, and bread, and every Tuesday or Wednesday when their time come, you'd see them in line.

Mc What do you say they stood in line for?

J For bread, to the bakery. You see, they couldn't sell it. They had to give it away... they couldn't sell it, so people would form a line and they'd give it to them.

They had what they called the WPA line along in here, you know. I didn't want to join a CCC camp (Civilian Conservation Corp) along in here because I wanted to work and go to school, and things. After going to Gainesville and staying there with my aunt, I got a job to a basket manufacturer at night. I'd go in at 3:30 in the afternoon, and I'd get off (work) at 12 at night and come home. I lived quite close to the plant there, in the seaboard section in Gainesville. So, I would go to school in the morning and get through and go straight to the job.

Mc What was your schooling like? Was it more than one room?

J Oh, it was good. It was more than one room. That was the Lincoln High School in Gainesville. Then during that first year I was going to high school there I begin to see and value life to myself and my family. I only saw my family a couple of months back home. I could help myself but I wasn't able to help my mother... I was making twenty cents an hour working for the Crate Mill at night. You see, I worked eight hours at night. I was making crates that you put your apples in. We was making baskets. That was called a Crate Mill but they made baskets.

So if he was paying us 20¢ an hour, I was just going there to work one of the machines. Inside hook and bottom. That's what I'd be putting on, and they would pay me 20¢ an hour. That was \$1.60 but I worked myself up so that I could work piece work. I worked there during the school term. When the school term was over, the Boss-man saw that I was easy to learn. So he gave me one of the machines to run myself. So when I learned to run the machine, then I was working piece work. Instead of making \$1.60, I could make three or four dollars a night!! When I was making a little more money and I could send to my mother and I could pay my board to my aunt... So I paid my way. I stayed there three years and I went through high school.

Right after the school year, they tried to send me to St. Augustine College. I didn't have the money at that time to go on to school. Mother needed help; her health wasn't

too good. She needed help. My mother died very young, when she was 33 years old. I tried to do all I could for her. That's the reason I was working. Then I went back home after the three years that I lived there in Gainsville. I got a better job in my old home town. I worked for the Grandville Greenhouse. This was a job that required a pretty good knowledge of knowing what flowers was about. I was raised up in all this stuff, like flowers, and I knowed the fern inside and out. There was stuff in there (the Greenhouse) you shipped all over the United States, and it was interesting. You shipped that all over. I got to be one of the foremen of a plant (after I left high school and got back). Well, we put in, as I say, a brand new greenhouse.

So, working there for the first year and a half, my Boss told me (he was a man that come from Canada). I'll never forget this, "If you was ever to marry, I'd furnish that house - let you live in that house up there - the packing house. I would furnish the house and you wouldn't have a thing to worry about". He says "I let you live there and of course you take care of painting the house for me". He was afraid he was going to lose me, you know. 'Cause a lot of places there was looking for a person that knows about ferns. And I did know about ferns in my life time! So he didn't want to lose me and have me go some place else. So he wanted to keep me there. He told me to go to Ocalo, Florida. This was the place I went to get the furniture. That's the first furnishings I put in. After getting the furniture, I married Mary Lou Williams, a girl that I had known quite a few years. I guess about ten years. The first two children that was born to us died. The first two. One lived three months and the other lived six months. Johnnie Junior, my boy, is the youngest (he is living now). My oldest, if she was living, would be 40 years old. Mary Lou came from a very large family; about 17.

During the war, World War II, I felt kind of unstable. I didn't know whether to wait for them to call me or to do something. I waited for them but nothing occurred. They weren't taking married men. So I said, "Well, if they didn't draft me

or nothing"...I knew quite a few people in my area that did travel and I met one fellow that I knew very well, Oscar Spence. He was a man that had trucks that he would transfer what we called perishable goods from the south to the north. One day during the summertime, I want to tell you, Mac, that during the summertime, people in that area, where I lived there, they didn't do much work in the summertime. It was off-season. We'd await until the orange-season come along and we would start picking fruit. I would start picking fruit during September.

Mc Were you still working at the factory, Johnnie? The fern factory
J No. You see, I did give up working at the fern factory. He did try to keep me there. Well, I could make more money. That's what I was for. You can leave one job and it's a question of "why" did you leave. I never would tell a person anything different; Because I wouldn't take a lesser job which offered me less! This is what I did all my life. I would try to better myself all the time. I mean, if I was going to work, I was going to work where I could make the most money. Well, this is what I sought to do.

Oscar Spence, I learned this about him; he'd pay so much a truck-load if you would, say, haul strawberries and plants into ^{the} New York market. Well, he paid thirty-six dollars plus all your expenses. And when you got back home, you had \$36.00. You could make a trip a week. I made a trip every week... on his truck.

Mc You were the truck driver?

J I was the truck driver. And he said one morning, he said, "You want to go to New York?" I said, "You keep saying about New York. Whereabouts in New York?" I say, "Now there's a lot of New York, but I'd like to know whereabouts in New York you going?" And he said, "A place named Lyndonville." I says, "Is that a big place (laughter) or what size of a place is it?" He said, "No, it is a fruit belt." He knows you like to pick fruit. And you go up and get a load... during the time she was there with me in August, we'll get a load of whatever it was during that season. We brought a load up to Syracuse, and then was coming over to Lyndonville and get

a load of - I know we couldn't wait until about a month, hauling tomatoes. And it was around the first of August and I promised to get out before winter.

Mc This would be in 1941, Johnnie?

J Yes, 1941. So he said, "Johnson, are you going to really come?" And I said, "Yeah". He packed up and I left with him. He was a white fellow. Him and I drove. We slept in the truck. We'd get tired of driving; we'd pull over to the side of the road and we'd sleep. Well, we made it up here in about - I'll never forget that - on a Thursday night, in Medina. He said, "Medina, New York". But that day we wait around on the corner where the bank is there (Main and Center Streets). I'll never forget that! He stopped at this drug store there and went in. It was night, seven o'clock at night he stopped. He said, "It ain't too far now. I think it's about seven miles to Lyndonville". So we pulled up to Lyndonville, and I'll never forget this too. We pulled up in Lyndonville to Ed C. Bentley Oil. I don't know as you know him? Bentley. So Bentley, the old man. I'm not talking about his son, Roger-- evidently he knew Oscar Spence because he had been coming there over the years. He had been coming up before I came up. So he turned and said, "Do you have any place for these boys to stay?" There was three of us. The Boss came up. He said, "Yes, I got a place for them to stay". So we stayed in that house, the next one down from the Bentleys. Yeah, we stayed there overnight and the next morning we got up and he says, "Well, let's go out and pick tomatoes". Picking them was cold. The first time I ever saw any of this frost. That was in August! Around the 22nd of August, 1941. That wasn't snow. That was frost! ... Everything was white when we got there in the morning. Goodness alive!!... They were afraid they were going to lose their tomatoes. So, we went down on the Lake, Lake Ontario. Down there is where I made my first haul. I went down there and got a load of tomatoes and I hauled them over to Millers Packing House. They had a packing house, the Millers Packing House, over there. He used to haul tomatoes over there for Bentley. During that time, Oscar was paying us fifty cents an hour. Well, I like to pace myself. I told Oscar, "I'll be frank when I talk to you. I can earn big money. I didn't

come up here to work by the hour, you know. If I'm going to work, I like to get out of there and you pay me so much. So much, see? So this is our idea; not that you have to work by the hour. We works by the piece". ... So finally Bentley got on to what we was talking about, so he seemed to agree. 'Cause he wasn't going to get tomatoes picked by us for 50¢ an hour. Not that far from home! We came to make some money.

So he agreed to pay us, I think, twenty cents a basket. And we made out pretty good during then. Then it rained. They was apt to have a cold rain. Well, they was a Cold Storage owned by Harm Rowley. Old man Rowley: Cold Storage. Rowley Cold Storage, in Lyndonville. And he told us that we could go up there and work in Cold Storage. I said to the man, "You mean to tell me that I go up there to get warm, and work in the Cold Storage?? (laughter). I'm kinda lame. I ain't used to that kind of cold". ... So I did go down; and in there was this powdered milk and eggs, and all this stuff. So we did, when it was raining we didn't have nothing else to do. So we just went in and helped them out, you know... So when it was raining, we'd come right down there and work for old man Rowley.

So now, Christmas time Harm Rowley called me aside and I guess he looked at me and he said, "I'm going to say something to your man". Because he had heard all of us talking about leaving, see; and going back south. And we was! We didn't come to stay!! We just come to go back! So, he called me aside and he said, "Johnson". He had learned all us boys names. He said, "You think you can bring me some boys back up here to pick fruit next year?" And I said, "I think so". He said, "Well, all I want you to do is call this number". And he give me this number, the Cold Storage number. So, he wanted me back up before. We came in August. He wanted us up there the latter part of April and May because he had some work to do. Like tractor driving. So I told he, "Okay. So, I did call him. But Oscar Spence didn't know that Rowley had actually come back. He didn't know of this. But I was still my own Boss, you know. He was the Boss, but he didn't know

that Rowley tried to get me to come back. So I called Rowley and he said, "Yes, he would want me to come back up". And I asked him how many men to bring, and he said, "Twenty. Good! I am going to send you". He asked how much their fare is. I said, "I think it is twenty dollars on the bus". He said, "I am going to send you \$400.00 plus." He didn't tell me what the plus was until I got it. So, he did send the \$400.00 and I bought the tickets. And he told me, "You know, the boys that will come, if they work hard and they work for me, they won't have to pay any fare when they come up here." So I said, "Okay". So, they agreed to come, and they didn't have to pay any fare. He gave them the fare if they worked with him. He'd give them the fare. Most of them was pretty good men and stuck with him and he had North-western green apples over there that needed picking. He told me that they was almost falling to the ground. ...

Mc How did the men live when they got here?

J Oh, he bought the Loke farm... and he had that remodeled. And that's where he housed the men. On the farm there.

Mc Did he provide their food, or did they have to buy it?

J They had to buy their own food... All he did was furnish a place for them to live. So, they came up here. But I tell you, I had to get them out of Florida because they (officials) was dead against recruiting. Well, I don't know whether this was what you would call psychology or not. But I would have two to leave, maybe like seven o'clock or whatever the bus schedule, and I'd have them leave, spaced. Probably get a couple other tickets and leave 50 miles away, and then present the ticket all up here. Because it was during the time of war time (WW II) and people needed the "hands" down there. And they didn't want a guy to leave (the state). But in particular, the people that came here, Mac, they didn't owe nobody. But they (officials) was catching everybody who was leaving, you know. They would have a hard time. But I knew this. And so (their departure) they would be staggered. And I got them up here by bus and all of them was met right here at the Armstrong Drug Store (Main and Center Streets in Medina). That was a bus stop at the time.

After they had worked here one season for Mr. Rowley he said, "Johnson", he said, "I am going to ask you to stay". He said, "I'll get you a job inside where you won't have to work in the Cold Storage; you only have to work for me in the summer time, and work inside in the winter". Well, I really am going to take him up on this because I didn't like the Cold Storage. I'll be frank with you, I didn't like the cold storage.

Mc I worked in one (one summer) and I know what you mean! (laughter)

J So, getting back to the farm again... Snyders wanted some people to work at Snyders. So Mr. Rowley 'phoned me and said that those people over here needed help in the canning factory. "Well", I said, "I had a friend of mine that had been up here and went back". I told him to do the same thing I did. To show somebody you know that would really be worthwhile for coming. So they did the same thing that I did, for Snyder. And that's when they start paying the people that did this, come from the south. So, they used the same technique that I used to get the first ones. And during this time, I don't know whether you remember it or not, Mac, working through Lyndonville, working with the farmers, and I worked with many other farmers, helping them harvest their crops. I had the opportunity to work with Jamaicans. The first Jamaicans that came to Orleans County, they landed in Albion and they was put in Lyndonville in the Grange Hall... There was 900 of them who was put in the Grange Hall in Lyndonville. And at the Fair Grounds. I forget how many they had at the Fair Grounds in Albion. So, we had a man that was acquainted with this man named Jim. He was a retired engineer, in Albion. He worked with the Water Department for a long time. I worked with him. I knowed him, you see. Well, Jim was over to the camp in Lyndonville. He was in charge of both places: in Lyndonville and in Albion. This was the first migrants... I'll never forget this. Paul Parsons and I put up the first septic tank that was put down here. (laughter). We put a septic tank for those Blacks when they first came to Lyndonville. We worked together... We dug the first septic tank, preparing for those people that was coming in from Jamaica.

Yeah! Of course he was working for his father then. And that's a pretty good while ago... We talk about this thing now! (laughter) He and I used to play ball together.

So, getting back to Mr. Rowley. He told me that he would give me this job. So I asked him where this job is and he said, "The Harrison Radiator Division of General Motors". I said, "Whereabouts is that?" He said, "Lockport". He said he'd get me a job at Harrisons. So, he wrote this man. His name was Lee Blossom. And the funny thing about it, Mac, when he give me this note to carry up there, he had bought a car. And I'll never forget this. He bought a Model-A '31 car and he got me some transportation back and forth. And he told me, he said, "Now", he said, "This will be transportation for you back and forth from Lockport". You see, I still lived on that farm in Lyndonville.

Mc Were you married at this time, Johnnie?

J ... No, I was divorced at this time because my first wife, I was divorced before I left Florida. But, when I went to Lockport to get this job, there was a grey-headed man. I'll never forget his sitting up there at what you call the Information Desk. And he said to me, he says, "Who you come to see?" I handed him the note and he said, "Who give you this?" I said, "Mr. Rowley at Lyndonville". He said, "Oh". So, he goes over there, and when he comes back with Lee Blossom. I acted like I never saw the man before, and he made like he used to know me all the time! He took me by the hand and said, "Come on in, Johnson", and set me down. And then McCormick, he was the Personnel Manager then, he said, "Rev. Johnson". He filled out an application form for me". And I know I didn't have no papers up here. But he says to me "Okay, we are going to fix you up".

I went upstairs and they took the picture and fingerprints. But I have a question then. I asked, "What is all this about?" "You got to take fingerprints", he says to me. "You are going to be working in defense work for the government!"

I says, "Yeah?" After they had taken my picture, then they said, "Well, you are going to have to need some coupons." I said, "Coupons? What for?" He says, "Gasoline between here and Lyndonville. It's rationed." "Rationed?", I said. She sent me on down in and I got the coupons and everything I'd need. ... I don't know how many gallons it was, now. But these coupons, if I run out, I would go back to get more. I didn't worry about no gas! ... I started at Harrisons in 1943.

They wanted me to go to work the same day. And I told them, "No!" I couldn't go to work the same day. I had to get back and get myself straightened out. ...

So, I came that Monday and went to work. I looked around and I didn't see nobody else in there that looked like me! Nobody that looked like me!! (chuckles)

Mc You mean that you were the only Black person there?!

J Yes, the only Black person there. About two months later, they had another. I guess they think they better get somebody else in there, you know. The fellow was named J. C. Herb. He is the next one I know. And then they had another colored fellow - a colored fellow that worked there. I don't remember his name now. He's dead, but J. C. Herb is still living.

Mc How did the other workers, the white workers, treat you?

J Well, I was in the Foundry Department. Harrisons had a foundry over there. You see, they was mostly Polish and Italian. They didn't bother me. They was glad to get in there too, themselves. They had a hard time getting into that place for a job there. So I got along very well with the people that I worked with. As a matter of fact, I talked with a fellow that I first worked with, today. When I first started there. I talked with a fellow today, this very day. Him and I. We was talking about him and I was the only two left that was working at Harrisons. I mean, we worked together, see?

Mc That's really something, isn't it Johnnie!

J Well, down through the years I got along with the people. You know, there come a time, I am taking this from my Mother. She said, "Johnson, you got in this world six months to tend to your business, and six months to leave the other fellow's business alone. That makes twelve months out of the year.

Son, if you follow this, you will have no trouble". And I find this to be very true. Now what she was saying to me: "Regardless to what anybody else do, you tend to your business. Regardless of he or she or whoever, if you don't say nothing". And she always used the words, "If you hear something, say something. If you hear nothing, say nothing". Now, this was the psychology she used telling me how to get through this world. Now, there was a couple of times when people say a lot of uncomplimentary things to me that I know. But I look at the person to see who's speaking. You see, this is my plan. That's why I got along. People wonder and say "I don't see how you made it among these people . I couldn't have if I'd been in your shoes!". I always said this: " I guess I'm a Christian and I think this had a lot to do with it". When you see a person who says anything out of the ordinary, you feel sorry for him. This is the way I went through all my life. I felt sorry for the person when they say the wrong things to me. Whatever they call me, whatever name they want to call me, I take it like nothing. I take it like they're the greatest favor to me. Nothing but the greatest favor to me. So, I take this, I guess, not only in that Department. I went to many departments. My foreman, I always remember him: Findley. He was the foreman where I got my promotion soon, doing what I was told to do. I wouldn't balk. But I'll tell you one thing; when he did wrong, I let him know!! This is one thing, if he did wrong I let him know. But as long as he had a job to do, I respect him as Foreman. I always have this and I always taught younger people: in order to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower. So, this is how I came along.

Now Mac, I guess you want to know about when I married again; when I married Ethel. It was during the same time that I got these people from Florida to work at Snyders. She (Ethel) was working out of Akron, New York. She had come over here to work and during the time that I was coming back, her husband had died. Her husband was a coal miner and she told me that he died. I was divorced and so we went to seeing each other. She used to come over. Mr. Rowley used to call her "a little Indian girl".

Mc Ethel came from Akron? Did she have any Indian in her?

J No, I don't think so. She used to come over to see me. She used to call up over there at Lyndonville.

So, Ethel and I was married in '45. We had seen each other for a year or so before we married because I wasn't thinking about marrying at that time. But in '45 we were married. And then, I tell you we been married and we had a new apartment. We was married up here. We had a new apartment. We come back and stayed up here.

But all those years I would say was good years; good relations. And the job, as I say, before we were promoted Mac, all up through the years, I worked with the same men at the Harrison's job. I worked at anything except the tool room. I wasn't a tool and dye maker, and I wasn't a machine repairman. But anything else at Harrison had, you name it and I've been it! That was my job. From press operator, welder. You name any job, and I have operated in there. Been all through that thing. And when I left the foundry as a finish molder, I was an instructor at Harrisons.

(end of tape # 1)

J We are getting back to some of the things the way I had with Harrisons for the last 35 years. I've been working there, as you know, for about thirty-five years. But my stay with General Motors has been very profitable and I can say again Mac, that there's been some hard and maybe, to some people, some unfair things been done. But I take it as experience in my life. It's prepared me for a better life to live; and come to know people and know why people say the things and why people do the things they do. This is all in my life that I feel that God has prepared me to meet the opposition head on and know how to help myself when it comes to that kind of situation. People will accept you where people don't ordinarily accept you. I can understand why, and this don't bother me! It bothers some people. It don't bother me! I had gone from department to department to find out.

Even I've helped people of other races to come together. Just like a fellow came to me and said, "Johnson, I don't know why you would tolerate such language!" I said, "Let me

say this to you... "To kneel down anything for the Man Upstairs, when I have a chance to do that. When I say "the Man Upstairs", I mean the Lord. Anytime I can say a word for Him, I'm going to say it. I guess I'll say this: they don't like the other man's ways of doing something. But I can't help it because everybody there knows me. People say, "How come this person know you? Everywhere you go, people know you!" I said, "If you had been in this place 35 years, they would know you too!! I think I stick out like a sore thumb, if you want to say so!" (laughter). They got a laugh out of it when I told them that. But that don't bother me. That don't bother me. It don't bother me Mac. I've traveled all through, from management right on down to the lowest ones in Harrisons. I try to help regardless to whether he is Black or White or Blue. I don't care what he is. If I can help him, I'll do it. If I can't help him, I won't do him no harm. That's the way I've been all my life.

I came to Medina to live in 1945. Ethel and I, we had been married then about exactly, we had been married a year when we moved into Medina from Lockport. The reason why we left Lockport was because we couldn't find a decent place to live. I was offered a place when we were over there. So when we went to look at this place they offered us to live, I'll never forget this, on Vine Street in Lockport. And this was in '44. There was over across the bank (canal bank) from the hill, there was a little house there. And Ethel says to me, to the man who brought us over there, she says, "You know my little dog at the house?" "Yeah". And we was renting at the time. We was staying over at Reed Street, her and I were. She said, "You know the little dog I got?" She told the man and she told Beulah too! She says, "I wouldn't put my dog in that house to live!" She told him, she says, "I wouldn't put my dog in that house!" (laughter). We had the money to pay. We didn't ask him to give us nothing. We had the money to pay. So, we wind up coming here to Medina. We couldn't find a place to live in Lockport, a decent place. So we landed right here on East Center Street along living with Clara and Frank MacMillin... He was living where the A & P (grocery)

used to be. He runs Watkins Products there. Well, Ethel and I, we rented the upstairs apartment. The whole upstairs. We lived there in '45. And there came a strike. General Motors went on a strike for 113 days. Ethel at that time, she got a job working for the Brownells. And after working there, that helped us out pretty good because she was working there. We just moved here in this area. And then she (Ethel) got a job to Mr. Earnie Hart. She worked for Earnie Hart on Erie (Street). That was Barney Hart's father, that died, you know. He is dead now. She went to work for them, them two people.

Mc On Erie Street?

J Yeah. They moved up here to a new house, but that's where she started to work for them.

Mc Did she work in the house?

J Yes. During all the time of the strike. She was the support of her and I; the main support. There was an income coming in. We had money. We made it.

There was a house on Church Street. The Apps family owned this house, and some way or other Ethel found out that this house was for sale. And she told me one evening when I came in... she tells me, "There is a house for sale on Church Street". And I say, "Well, okay. We ought to look into it and think of buying". So she said, "Well, we'll go down". So we went down. Apps lives right where the Liquor Store there on Starr Street. You know Starr Street?

Mc Starr and South Main Street?

J Well, Apps lived there somewhere. So we went there and she said, "Yeah, I'll sell it to you".

Well, Frank and Clara, the people where we lived, told me that those white folks ain't going to let you live there. So the word went out, that we was going to buy it! So Ethel said to Clara, she says, "As long as I tend to my business and they tend to their business, I can get along with anybody; just like that." So we went over. We had money in the Lockport Bank, so we draw it out and put it in Medina Savings and Loan Association on West Center Street there. (This S-L is now located on Park Avenue in Medina). They hold the first mortgage. I said to Ethel, I said, "What we'll do, we'll deposit so much money there and ask them 'can we borrow it against

the money we deposited?' "So that's what we did. We put the money there, but we wanted to borrow an equal amount to pay for the place. And that's when we were buying the place. So we bought the place. After we bought it, we had to do a lot of cleaning up. We had to do a lot of work to this place on Church Street (#725 Church Street). We put about twenty-eight hundred dollars in remodeling inside. That house may not look good on the outside, but you go inside. It's got all hardwood floors. You go in that house. It's well fixed inside. Real nice inside. Kitchen, bath upstairs real nice. All the walls was tore out and refinished.

Mc Is that house still standing?

J Yeah. "Shorty" Bensley bought it from us. "Shorty" Bensley, the junk dealer (routes #31 and #63; present location of Club 31). He bought my place up there.

So, living on Church Street up until '54 or '55. Ethel and I lived there on Church Street.

I better tell you this: we joined the church on West Oak Orchard Street. The Pastor was Rev. W. L. Evans. Ethel, she joined first and I joined right after her. We joined the church. That was the Christmas of '45. And we started going there ourselves; going there. And along that time, Rev. Evans, he was a carpenter. I guess you knew him?

Mc I knew of him.

J Well, he was a carpenter. He was a carpenter... So, we joined the Glad Tidings Baptist Church over there on West Oak Orchard Street. And they only had a service in the afternoon. They didn't have any morning service at all. So I spoke to the Reverend. I said, "Reverend, I would love to have a service in the morning if it was feasible for us to have a service". Well, Deacon Bacon, I'll never forget. He is a white fellow, Bacon. He was a Deacon at the time. And Rev. Evans said to me, "Yes, we will see what we will be doing that at our next business meeting". So they all agreed. The Potters, and the Rev. Evans, and two or three. They didn't have too many members. But anyway, I went all out for them to help them to get the church lined up.

So Rev. Evans had this old car, LaceArrow. He said,

"Well, there's quite a few colored people in the outlying districts". They was way outside the city limits. Didn't too many live inside. So what we did then was to take what we call a survey of the people out in the rural areas. And I didn't own a car then. He let me have his car and I would go out on a Sunday morning.

Mc You didn't have a car then, Johnnie?

J No, not in '45. I had sold the other car I had way back when I came to Lyndonville. I didn't have a car but I was looking to go into the Service then (during WW II)... The survey started in '46. You see, this was during Christmas time in '45 we went into the church. So it had to be '46. When I got started into the church I could see that there was a lot of improvement could be done, you know. It was a funny thing. They was paying fifty cents for dues, you know. Dues to the Society. You couldn't buy two loaves of bread for that! So the minister and I went out and began to "shake the bushes"; find out who is, and who ain't! When I say that, I mean.. to the church. In fact the church welcomed me. The doors opened. "We'd like for you to come". And I said, "If you don't come, give me your children". And they'd say, "Yes". And I'd get the children; load them up, and then I'd ask the mothers and the fathers, "Won't you come to church?" I went as far as the muck (land) out there. I went as far, all around. Where no church was located for Black people, I went. Into the outlying districts. And they started coming in. Started coming in. And we had a pretty good church school there. Ethel, she was the Sunday School teacher. I, at that time, I just taught Sunday School. The church wanted me on the Deacon Board. I served under Deacon Bacon there for one year. And the next year they made me Chairman of the Board of Deacons. We had quite a few people coming to church. I remember that!

Rev. Evans was getting up in age and he asked me "Johnson, I tell you what you do. You should study for the ministry." I said, "Well". He said, "A person doing what you're doing, the Lord has something to do with it. You know persons don't do those things on his own. To have that kind of love for people unless God has something to do with it".

Mc Had you always been a student of the Bible? I mean, to know the Bible completely?

J Yes. You see, my conversion was back when I was in the deep South. It wasn't just yesterday. In fact it was back when I was thirteen years old that I confessed Jesus Christ as my personal Savior; love of people and one thing was taught: that the Lord said "Vengeance is mine". I would do the paying. I don't have anything to pay, but the Lord would do it. So, Rev. Evans, he kept focusing his mind on me, telling me all this. I said, "Oh Reverend, I'm doing this out of the goodness of my heart. I feel that this needs to be done for the people And I feel that the least a Christian can do is to help his fellow man". And he said, "Well, okay". So, I taught the Church School, and so after a while I had to ask for help. Charlie Williams, Ruthas Rumble, C. J. Jackson, Nathaniel Knights. I had all those Deacons under my jurisdiction. They would come to me. I was the Chairman of the Deacon Board over there.

So, I did do some studying with Rev. Evans. He give me a lot of books to study, Theology, to come to know people; why people do the things they do, and learn the parliamentary uses of the church and the Discipline of the church, the Doctrines. You had to know these in order that you'd know how to relate these to people when they'd come. You come to me, Mac, and you would say.. We have what we call a lot of "fault finders". But being a Christian leader you know I have to know how to deal with you. And in order to bring you into focus I would be able to tell you, "What you have done first?" The first thing you must do. In order that you can bring your Brother to see himself. So I mean, I knows! I knows the Scriptures comes to tell you what to do. So I, I don't use this unless I have to use it. A lot of times we have to use these things to get people to know really there's a law that in your Bible to tell you how to help people. Not you. But it's there for you to use. Then you can't say, "I did it." It's there. So, I was the Doctor. I guess I was the Doctor. I didn't take what other people tell me. You and I talked!! We'd leave all the others out. The other people away! You and I talked! So this is the way I held things, and

this is the way I got to know people, because I would never talk. You and I going to talk. We are not going to talk about somebody else. We are going to talk as individuals. So, that's the way; that's the way I was taught.

Now, Ethel, she really was a Bible student. My wife Ethel was! She was really a Bible student. She liked Mission work. And she said to me once, she said, "Why don't we adopt a girl?" I went along with her. As you know, Delores was our first adopted child.... Ethel had quite a connection out of New York (City) and Delores came from the Bronx. It cost us four hundred dollars even to consider going down to talk about getting her! With the papers and all, it cost us \$400.00 that one trip. It cost us.

So after we got Delores, you remember too again, Mac, Ethel says, "She's alone. We need a boy." So we adopted Walter. ...Walter came out of Manhattan. I believe he was out of there.

Mc Were they babies when you got them?

J No. Delores was six, and Walter was four. We wanted them to know they were adopted. One thing we always believed in: tell the child the truth when they ask you. They always ask the question "WHY". We would say, "Not everybody is as fortunate as you was. Maybe your parents was not too much unfortunate to do the things that you need to be taken care of... Rather than see you do without, they would rather see you in a home that care, with parents that would give you the love..." This made them feel more... there was somebody who cared. This is the feeling we left with our kids, our adopted kids. This made Delores feel uplifted by this. Somebody who cared! And we did care! We had a Mother's love and a Father's love for those kids, the same as we had for our own. And we tried to relate this down the years when our other boy, Junior, would come up. We would do for them the same as we would do for him.

In 1952, getting back to the church, Rev. Evans asked the church to license me as a licensed minister. So the church acted on this, and they did. ... After being licensed and proved that I was ready for the ministry, I preached my trial

sermon in '52. ... In '54 he asked the church to make me his assistant. His wife was very sick and she passed away in, I think it was '53, if I'm not mistaken. And then he said, "Johnson", he said, "If there is anybody that I want to have this church, it is you". He said, "But you are not ordained. You have to be ordained to take this church". So he had his daughter (as a witness). I think it was the last thing he told his daughter. It was the last thing, that he wanted me to be ordained. So after having said this, Rev. Murphy Greer from the Great Lake Baptist Association and the pastor of the Enoch Baptist Church in Rochester, New York, I wouldn't have to worry. The church had to send out letters to form a Council of Ministers and Deacons. This Council then met and they examined the fitness and the qualifications of the candidate of which church is calling for their pastor before he can be ordained. So they did this.

After I went through the examination my score was 87, which qualified me to be ordained. So after I went through the catacism and answered all of the questions that was asked of me I sent in WHY I want to be a minister. These are the things they asked. The tables of the church you have to tell them. And after you answer all of these questions then they -- we pulled back to the church. Their finding, whether I should be ordained. So, this is what happened to me. Then down through the years as pastor of a church.

Well, one thing that I really learned in pastoring: people is not going to relate to you, especially when you are young, and to the minister. I felt this, and I knew this. Some~~one~~ said, "You are too young to pastor." Some say, "You can't pastor me because you are not old enough". Some say, "You can't preach good enough". You have all kinds. But if you are a child of God... it's the word of God and you should believe it. This is my theory of the Word: if the Word of God comes out of the mouth of individuals and you don't believe it. He say, "When you hear my Word, harden not your heart". Now, this is the way they take it. Well, I tarried there

with the people for almost two years. They was profitable. They had money. They were in the process of building a new church. I had money and all the treasures that the church had. They was in good financial condition when I left the church. I'm a person who won't argue. They asked me for a resignation, but this they couldn't do because there was no fault. What I mean: to get rid of a pastor you've got to have more than say he can't preach, or there's nothing what you mean. Are you qualified to tell a person he can't preach? Are you able to say he can't preach? - These are the things that where you have a lot of questions, People come and ask you these questions. Or they say he is too young....

Well, I stayed at Glad Tidings for almost two years. And I come to find out that when you get in this - the Lord has showed me this. When people want to fight and carry on over nothing and you can't see it, You know the Lord enable you to dig a well for Him. He wants you to dig a well over there. So, I could see that there were people there that weren't going to stay there if I should leave. So the church members from the muck-farm told me, "We don't want you to stay there. You just come to Albion and open up a church". They says, "We'll be there".

So I didn't have any alternative but to let these people have what they want. Let them go where they want.

The church in Albion was established in a house on Clarendon Road. We started to have what we called a Prayer Service in Oliver Bradford's home. And we did find the church a place on Ingersoll Street where at the time there was a Methodist Church, A.M.E. Church. They was holding services there at the time we inquired who owned it and if we could lease it to hold service. And we could! We went to work and we acquired the church there and we started holding service there. We had twelve members to start with.... Six months later we had what we called Recognition Service and we had eighty people! We had churches represented from the Niagara Baptist Association. Rev. Faust of the First Baptist Church, he welcomed us there. We had Rev. Gordon Carter from the Gaines-Carlton Baptist Church. He was moderator of the

Recognition Service at the church in the afternoon. We had churches come in from Rochester, Rev. Greer. We had Rev. Daniels, we had representatives from Glad Tidings Baptist Church there. Rev. Robert Clark was a member of that church. We presented a letter to the Recognition Service. What we were saying to them was that we were ready to do the Lord's work. We had formed a Missionary Society within the body, we had a Church School that was organized, we had a B.T.U. (Baptist Training Union) within the church that was carried on in the afternoon. We had our mid-week Bible study class, and also a prayer service during the mid-week. So, after the Recognition sermon they heard all the reports. Then they set their approval for all our work and they declared that this is an established church. It was recognized. At that time it was a Niagara and Orleans County Association, but its area was the Frontier area Niagara Frontier Association. At that time it was the Niagara and Orleans Association. This was in June 1956.

Mc Is there a name for your church?

J Shiloh Baptist Church. That name was given to the church during one of our missionary meetings. We had suggested the name in one of our meetings, the church name. You see, we have grown out of that. We have moved from the site where we started from a little place to now on Zig-Zag Road and Crandall Road (Albion, New York).

As you know, Mac, we have purchased an old school building there and we had two phases of that church work done. We had the first phase: the basement. The next phase was the upper auditorium. So that now is completed.

We have done a lot of work outside the church, around in the community. You know that we have been involved in NAACP (National Advancement Association for Colored People). We found there is a need for job openings, not only for Blacks but also for all minority groups. That's what the purpose was aimed at: to try to get help for the local people that needed work. As you know yourself, Mac, there weren't any Black people that was hired in any stores until NAACP organized in Orleans County. And Rev. Johnson - myself - and other

members in the community and you know that to become a member of the NAACP without records, that we are not here to cause any trouble. We are here to promote good for all people. I think they know what NAACP stands for. I think what the people in the community, what they did, they opened up the door for these people. Many people got hired: Black, Puerto Ricans, and what else. They got hired in these different stores. This is what we call a progressive movement in Orleans County. Not only in housing, but we had to give the people the opportunity. At first they called it the C. A. C. That's the Community Action Committee. And when they came into this area -- did you know Mrs. Cleary's sister from Buffalo? (Mrs. Flynn). She came down here from Buffalo and I set in on the first meeting that they give, Here at the first start of the C.A.C. meeting. And long before that we had the migrant movement working in the community then.

Mc That was the Migrant Ministry (now called Ministry of Concern).

J Yes. That was working. They was working long before the CAC came. After the CAC came, there were many branches involved.

Furthermore the first Day Care Center, I give the man credit: I challenged Mr. George Wolfe, the Superintendent of (Albion) Schools. He said that he couldn't see this Day Care Center, the way it was spreading out.

Mc He said that he could not see it?

J No! He said they didn't want this thing here! But we, Thomas LaMont and Rev. Johnson, fought for it. Tom LaMont and I met him ^{Geo. Wolfe} at the Albion school with the Board of Education. We told them that we wanted this Day Care Center. That's when we had the great big Day Care Center set up in the school down here. You remember that Mac? The first big Day Care Center. We went to them and we said so. Now we got this Day Care Center, And that's where it started at.

Mrs. Flynn from Buffalo who started this CAC and this lady from Syracuse (Health, Education and Welfare office) she came up and she told us there were Federal funds and State funds. We asked one question of the Board of Education. We asked them this: "If Wyoming County can afford a Day Care Center, why can't we do it?" And that's when we got the

ball rolling. We told them, "Fifty children need this service". And they tell us we can't do it. "What do you mean, we can't do it! This is on a trial basis. We tried this thing, and all we want you to do is furnish us a bus and a driver." And that's what we did. We wasn't trying to discriminate anybody. We just wanted to try something. Out of this, look what you got! Now you've got it, continually. Well, this was just for the season. Now I understand that Welfare Rights (Commission) is supporting this thing. You know, it was taken care of. The mothers working that got children that need to put a place in his home and be taken care of, They help them. They are doing this. We have come a long way. A long way!

(NOTE: Additional information concerning the Genesee-Orleans Ministry of Concern, The War on Poverty and Expanded Welfare Services can be found in the Orleans County History Past to Present Bicentennial Year 1976, pages 27 - 32).

Mc Johnnie, how many people are in your church now?

J Well Helen, It stands to reason to say about 130 now, total. They don't all come at the same time. Shiloh has turned out more than 130. If all of Shiloh would come here, you wouldn't have a place to put them. Yeah!

We have a Home-coming once a year and we get people from Buffalo and all over that come to Home-coming. And you wouldn't even have a place to put them!

Mc When is your Home-coming Day?

J Home-coming Day is in August. We've got folks all over!

Mc Well, to bring this up to date Johnnie, Ethel passed away - what year was that?

J Well, Ethel passed away September 1973. In April the 27th, 1974 I married Martha Brandon. She's Martha Johnson now and she is very active in church as well as the other Mrs. (Ethel) Johnson. She's active in the church. She is doing a good job. It will take a while for her to come along where people will accept her. It will take quite a while.

Mc What do you mean, "For people to accept her". Because they loved Ethel so very much?

J Oh yes. This was hard, to take Ethel's place.

Mc Ethel was truly a beautiful person, a beautiful person.

Mc Well, I think that brings us up to date, unless there is anything more you'd like to say, Johnnie.

J Well, Mac, you and I had a wonderful experience. I think you could elaborate on that some because you called my attention to that, when we had to go out on a mission one time. Trying to help people. ... I'll never forget this occasion when you and I went to try to help Gene Heath. We went to the extreme. We got food for him, a house, and a job and transportation. But we didn't stop there. We didn't stop there. Anyway, Mac, we tried to do a job regardless who the people were. We did a good job for them. (NOTE: Gene Heath was a Black migrant laborer who hoped to break away from the so-called "migrant stream". Due to circumstances beyond the control of Mr. Heath, Rev. Johnson, or Mr. and Mrs. McAllister, Mr. Heath was unable to leave his job as migrant worker. He was later killed. A very tragic experience for all concerned).

.....

Well Mac, after my father died, the only thing my mother could think of doing was that she would have to take in a little bit more work. She was washing and ironing clothes. I can remember very well that there were three or four families she was taking care of their laundry . . . and that it was hard to supplant the income wherein she'd be able to put food on the table for us children. And not only that. She was doing field work, working in the orange groves; she would also work in tomatoes and all vegetable crops during the season. Then she would tell us how our grandparents came up through the slavery time and they was sold from one master to another during the years. She'd tell how they had to work.

She did tell me this: my Mother's parents was given some land after they was freed. I think she told me it was 40 acres of land, and they increased that land to 84 acres, which would be 88 acres. And they did the farming there. And that's what we call "The Old Homestead" today. That's in Florida. So there's quite a story behind that. Talk goes on now concerning the Homestead, but we do have relatives still in Florida . They have their own business: such as a restaurant.

business, housing contractor, and some in the undertaking business. So you see they came up through the times. They know what money really is and what it was. They came up through the years that really count, to your own family. They really stuck together. I think I'm the only "stray sheep" in the fold. (laughs). My brother — and I are about the only stray ones who left home. But thanks be to the goodness of the Lord for taking care of us. I have a home and he has a home. I live, as you know Mac, at 400 West Oak Orchard Street in Medina, New York. So I'm well situated and I'm about ready to retire now. Maybe next year I'll go out on retirement, in '79. I don't think I could stay any longer. Of course people have asked me if I would stay longer but I think that since I have stayed with this company for 35 years, I think that New York has got the best of my years anyway.

Mc When you retire, John, do you think you will stay in Medina?

J Well, I think I will probably stay a little while but I don't think I will stay up too long. But I wanted to make sure that anybody that does take over my place in the church that the church will still go on. Of course I know that it will still go on because the Lord will always have somebody to carry on. But for me to continue to live here, I don't think so.

Mc You don't like the snow? (laughter)

J Well, I probably would come back and forth to see the people I know. I would do like the woodchuck: I'd go down south. (laughter) That would be my hole instead of up here. See, the woodchuck got his hole up here, but I think I'll go south for my hole. Then in the summertime I would come back and see the people. I like the snow. I've lived here for almost 40 years, almost, so that's over half of my life. I know I've lived here more than I have in the south!

Well, it was really thoughtful of you, Mac, and Helen to think to have me to come and have this sitting (interview) because I never dreamed that this would happen to me. But thank God you people thought enough of me to have me ~~to have~~ ~~me~~ come and share with you some of my experiences that I have had in my life span. It's been very rewarding to me, as well, to come and sit down and talk with you folks.

Mc Well Johnnie, you are a part of the history of Orleans County.

(end of taped interview)

Rev. Johnnie Thinks The Time Is Right!

*July
1978*

One principle has always guided the Rev. Johnnie Johnson of Medina, who is pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church of Albion. "When you find you are no longer useful in any program, take your hands off."

And that's what he will do at Shiloh Baptist, located at Zig Zag and Crandall Road on the edge of Albion. He has tendered his resignation and said: "It is with regret that I must resign as pastor, because I cannot accomplish what I want to or should in Christian service to the church or the community. I have enjoyed working with people who have contributed so much to the happiness and welfare of the community."

He expressed "heartiest" good wishes for the continued success of the church which he founded in 1956 when a group of 12 people wanted a worship center. He had been assistant to



Rev. John Johnson

the late Rev. W. L. Evans at Glad Tidings Baptist Church in Medina in the early 1950s and then advanced from deacon to pastor through studies.

In 1956 Shiloh Baptist became a reality in a former Methodist Church building on Ingersoll Street, Albion. In 1972 the present church was built and dedicated.

"I am a persuader and when I cannot persuade people anymore, then I am not useful to a program," added the pastor on his departure from the Albion pulpit. But he intends to remain active in serving churches on call and perhaps in social work and related fields as a clergyman.

Johnnie was born in Florida, but came to Orleans in 1942 and was aided in permanent employment by Haromon Rowley of Lyndonville. He eventually became a Harrison Radiator Division employee and has remained with that company, although he'll retire this year after 35 years.

He remembers the days of the migrant labor flow into Orleans and how he helped get accommodations and to settle 900 Jamaicans brought here by the food processing plants.

He is a member of the

American Baptist Convention, the Niagara-Erie Baptist Association, the Albion Ministerial Association and has taken seminars at Colgate-Rochester.

He has three grown children and continues to live at 300 W. Oak Orchard St. in Medina. After his first wife's death from lengthy illness, he remarried.

His parting words: "I am still available for service to the community in Christian work."

The two hour interview with Johnnie Johnson was conducted by Arden and Helen McAllister in their home at 116 Highland Avenue in Medina, New York.

Luther Burroughs of Albion, N.Y. transcribed part of this interview.

Lysbeth Hoffman of Waterport, N.Y. transcribed a part of this interview.

Final editing, checking and typing was done by Helen McAllister of Medina, New York.