

Johnson House and property history

The Johnson's first home was built in 1923 but was distorted by fire. It was located about 200 yards South-West of the present home site. Charlie, Mildred and their three children, John Wesley, James C, and Vivian Louise move in their second home in 1927. The house was built by Kervin and Curtis Walker. The brothers were local carpenters who lived in Leroy. Charlie Johnson often spoke about the two white carpenters that built his home. The Walkers also help build the African American school in Prestwick (Prestwick High School), a Rosenwald school. The school no longer stands however a historic marker located in the "Prestwick Preservation Park" commemorates the school and the Walker brothers. (The Park is the first African American Park in Washington County devoted to preserving Black History).

House Design: The Johnson house was designed with four moderately large rooms with a typical farmhouse kitchen and a front porch that stretches across the entire front portion of the house. A wide cement sidewalk leads to the front entrance of the house, with two large flower pots on each side of the entrance (those original cement pots are still there). The house has a screened in back porch and storage area. There are two fireplaces with tall chimneys that tower over a pyramid style roof.

Note: Pyramid roofs were very popular during the years prior to 1930.

Charlie Johnson was a well-known throughout the Washington County area and the adjoining Clarke County area as a farmer and merchandiser. His crops fed many families in the community and neighboring counties. Johnson owned 20 acres of farmland, Purchase from Sallie Prince in 1923. He also farmed and was the overseer for the Palmer Richardson property (a white landowner) and farmed other properties in the area. Charlie's wife, Mildred was known for her hand made quilts. Her beautiful quilts are presently stored in the home. Their son, John Wesley moved north to Ohio and pursued a career with Dayton Steel where he remained until his retirement, he then moved back to Prestwick. Their son James was a well known Brickmason and carpenter, James built the addition on the Johnson House in the 60's, he also built the Concession Stand and Farm Shed located on the Johnson property in the 60s. James built his own home in 1959, his property is located next door to his father's House. James home was the first brick home built in the Prestwick/Leroy area and James was the first African American in the Prestwick/Leroy area to build a brick house. James built a total of seven (7) homes in the Prestwick/Leroy area. He also played a major roll in building the Joe McCorquodale bridge that crosses the Tombigbee River, separating Washington and Clarke County. James was Instrumental in building many businesses and churches in Washington and Clarke County. Their daughter Vivian owned 20 acres next to her fathers 20 acres. Her home was also built next door to the Johnson house where she grew up. Vivian was well known for her beauty, her ability to play the piano and for her career in the nursing profession. Vivian Johnson and her cousin Margie McNeil were the first African-American nurses in the area during that time. She played music for local churches for over 50 years and retired from Jackson hospital after 20 years of nursing service. Her careers were respected by both doctors and nurses in Washington and Clarke Countries.

In the 40's the Johnson home and property were popular gathering places. The Johnson "baseball field" was located on Johnson property, behind the Johnson home. The team (the Red Sox) were owned and managed by Charlie Johnson and his brother Jimmie Johnson. On weekends people came from far and wide to see the African-American team play. (The baseball field is still maintain to this day by the grandsons and great grandsons of Charlie Johnson).

The African-American team would travel to the neighboring Mobile County to play and practice with other African-American players including Hank Aaron. At that time Aaron had not achieved national

fame however Aaron's talents were recognized in the surrounding area and the Prestwick Red Sox were skilled enough to play against Aaron.

A small building that served as a concession stand/Store was built around 1960 to accommodate the many visitors that came to the games, Charlie's wife, Mildred Johnson and her daughter Vivian would serve barbecue, drinks and other refreshments to the large crowds. A large barbecue pit was located under a massive oak tree behind the concession stand.

The Johnson's Barbecue Pit was a local attraction! The Johnson's would cook ribs and chicken for the many visitors and "Mr. Charlie" (as he was called) was known for serving the best "spirits" In the area. His customers included local doctors, lawyers and other well-known citizens in Washington and surrounding Counties. Even though Washington County was a dry county at that time, everyone enjoyed attending the wonderful baseball games and sipping on the "spirits". No one bothered Mr. Charlie about his "secret brew". The team continued to play until 1970.

The land, the house, and most of the buildings are still on the property with more of their original features, with the exception of the barn and the outhouse (outside toilet). A covered water pump and a covered shed was used to store farm tools and farm equipment, are still standing.

The old community of Prestwick is rich with undocumented history. Through research PPS has documented the history of the entire Prestwick Community including old buildings and homes. Unfortunately there are only three historic African-American homes from the early 1900's still standing in the community.

History by:

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