

= Howard Hille Johnson =

Howard Hille Johnson ( February 19 , 1846 ? February 8 , 1913 ) was a blind American educator and writer in the states of Virginia and West Virginia . Johnson was instrumental in the establishment of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind in 1870 , after which he taught blind students at the institution 's School for the Blind for 43 years .

Johnson was born in 1846 near Franklin in Pendleton County , Virginia ( now West Virginia ) to the affluent and prominent Johnson family . His father , Colonel Jacob F. Johnson , represented Pendleton County in the West Virginia Legislature and his grandfather , James Johnson , represented the county in the Virginia General Assembly . Like his elder brother James , Johnson was born with severe visual impairment which became total blindness a few years after his birth . He and his brother received their early education at home from a governess . Johnson furthered his education at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind , a common school in Franklin during the American Civil War , and at a classical school in New Market . During his studies at New Market , Johnson made considerable progress in mathematics , literature , science and foreign languages .

In 1865 he returned to Franklin , where he and his brother conducted a private classical school . Johnson undertook advanced studies at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind for his profession as a teacher from 1866 to 1867 . He returned to Franklin , establishing a public school under the free education system , and in 1868 accepted a teaching position at a Moorefield public school .

In early 1869 , Johnson identified the need for a school for the blind in the new state of West Virginia ; with statehood , deaf and blind West Virginia children attended schools for the deaf and blind in neighboring states ( with West Virginia paying their tuition ) . Johnson began corresponding with West Virginia Governor William E. Stevenson , canvassing across the state to arouse public sentiment in support of a school for the blind . Despite rebukes from prominent West Virginian politicians , Johnson became the leading advocate for a state institution for the blind . He and other educated blind people staged an exhibition in the legislative chamber of the West Virginia House of Delegates , which was praised by the legislators .

The bill establishing the school was presented to the West Virginia House of Delegates for a vote , and before it became state law the words " deaf and dumb " were inserted before " blind " throughout its text . The final version of the bill establishing the West Virginia Institution for the Deaf , Dumb and Blind became state law on March 3 , 1870 . At the time of the institution 's establishment Johnson was only 24 years old , and is credited by West Virginia historians as the founder of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . Serving on the school 's inaugural Board of Regents , he was later selected as its principal teacher . The school began its first academic session on September 29 , 1870 . Johnson taught in its blind department continuously for 43 years , until his death in 1913 . In addition to his educational work , Johnson wrote prose and poetry and was a member of the Romney Literary Society .

= = Early life and family = =

Johnson was born on February 19 , 1846 at his family 's home on Friend 's Run , near Franklin in Pendleton County , Virginia ( now West Virginia ) . His father , Colonel Jacob F. Johnson , was a prominent citizen of the county and served in the West Virginia Legislature from 1872 to 1873 . Johnson 's grandfather , James Johnson , represented Pendleton County in the Virginia General Assembly and was a member of the 1829 Virginia Constitutional Convention . Like his elder brother James , Johnson was born with severe visual impairment which became total blindness several years after his birth . His affluent parents were determined to prepare Johnson and his brother for the challenges of life by providing them with the opportunities afforded to sighted children , arranging for their sons to receive a good education and " proper instruction " and teaching them self @-@ sufficiency . Johnson 's father employed a governess to instruct him and his brother at home , and James was taught to read from books using braille .

= = Education = =

James ( Howard 's brother ) enrolled at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Staunton in 1848 at age ten , completing his coursework there in 1855 . After his graduation Johnson 's father urged James to become a teacher , and at age 17 he taught a summer school on the South Fork South Branch Potomac River . James was also Howard 's primary instructor , preparing him for higher education . Johnson followed in his brother 's footsteps two years later , enrolling at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind at age eleven . Although he studied there for four years , the school closed after the 1861 outbreak of the American Civil War and he was unable to complete his education there . At Staunton , teachers and acquaintances acknowledged Johnson 's " remarkably rapid " progress in his studies . His studies were otherwise uninterrupted during the war ; he attended a common school in Franklin , and was taught by James with sighted children . Johnson could not read text , and his lessons were read to him by his classmates .

In 1863 James encouraged him to further his education at a classical school in New Market , since Johnson had completed the coursework at the Franklin common school . The New Market school was taught by Joseph Salyards ( or Saliards ) , a professor and writer described as one of " the most learned men of the age " and " a most remarkable scholar in many respects . " Johnson was accompanied to New Market by a young man with the surname of Clark , who read him his lessons ; he tutored Clark in several subjects , including French . At New Market , Johnson made so much progress in mathematics , literature , science and foreign languages with his sighted classmates that he returned to Franklin after two years . In 1866 the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Staunton offered him the opportunity to advance his professional studies in education , and he completed one term in 1867 .

After Johnson 's departure the New Market school became known as the New Market Polytechnic Institute , with Salyards remaining on its faculty . The institute , through Salyards ' efforts , conferred on him a " most gratefully appreciated " Master of Arts degree in 1877 .

= = Early teaching career = =

When Johnson returned to Franklin from New Market he was reunited with James , and they founded a private classical school where he taught during the winter of 1865 ? 66 . The Johnsons ' school offered an opportunity for young men in Franklin whose studies were interrupted by the war to complete their education .

After Johnson finished his term at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind , he returned to Franklin and founded a public school in September 1867 operating under the free education system recently authorized in Pendleton County . The following year he accepted a teaching position in Moorefield , teaching with " great acceptance " for three successive terms at a public school .

= = Campaign for a West Virginia school for the blind = =

= = = Search for public support = = =

While Johnson was teaching at Moorefield in early 1869 , he decided to establish a state school for the education of the blind ; no provision for such a school had been made in the new state 's public @-@ school system since its creation six years earlier . Before West Virginia statehood , deaf and blind youth in western Virginia attended the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Staunton ( as Johnson had ) . After statehood , deaf and blind West Virginia children attended schools for the deaf and blind in neighboring states ; West Virginia paid their tuition . Hoping to expedite the foundation of a state school for the blind , Johnson began a correspondence with newly @-@ inaugurated Governor William E. Stevenson ( who assured Johnson of his " sympathy and support " for the school ) . In addition to lobbying the governor , Johnson began canvassing the state to arouse public support for the proposed school .

= = = Search for legislative support = = =

Due to Johnson 's campaign , which gained wide public support for the school , the West Virginia Legislature convened a session in Wheeling ( then the state 's capital ) on January 18 , 1870 and proposed legislation establishing a school for the blind that year . After drafting the bill , Johnson traveled to Wheeling ; en route , at Fairmont , he met former Union Governor of Virginia Francis Harrison Pierpont . Although Johnson tried to enlist Pierpont 's support in formally presenting the proposed legislation to the legislature , Pierpont said that he " could not afford to connect his name with an enterprise so sure to fail " . Pierpont was not the only state legislator to decline Johnson 's request ; Joseph S. Wheat , member of the West Virginia House of Delegates representing Morgan County , believed that the proposed bill would fail because he felt that the state could not establish any more public institutions .

Undaunted by these rebukes from prominent West Virginian politicians , Johnson remained the leading advocate for a state institution for the blind . With help from friends and other educated blind people , he was granted the use of the legislative chamber of the West Virginia House of Delegates to present an exhibition of " music , [ scholarly ] recitation , and class drill " with a delegation including his brother James and blind educator Susan Ridenour . Johnson 's exhibition attracted a large audience , and after the performance he delivered an impassioned plea to West Virginia lawmakers to establish a state school for West Virginia 's blind youth . The exhibition and Johnson 's speech were praised by the legislators , most notably Joseph Wheat ( who had previously rebuffed his proposal ) . The day before Johnson 's presentation , Wheat declared his opposition to the bill and advocated its defeat ; after Johnson 's speech he " pressed up to [ Johnson ] and grasping his hand , said earnestly , ' Johnson , I 'll vote for your bill if it costs a hundred thousand dollars ' " .

The bill for the school was presented to the House of Delegates by John James Davis , representing Harrison County . When it was introduced it outlined the establishment of a school only for the blind , not the deaf . The approved bill progressed through the necessary steps , and shortly before it became state law it was amended by House Delegate James Monroe Jackson of Wood County ; Johnson advocated the insertion of " deaf and dumb " before " blind " in every instance in its text as a " humane and economic " measure . Jackson 's amendment was accepted , and the bill establishing the West Virginia Institution for the Deaf , Dumb and Blind became state law on March 3 , 1870 . Although Johnson had campaigned for a state school for the blind , it was common practice during the 19th century to combine schools for the deaf and blind as one institution . At the time of the institution 's founding he was 24 years old , and is credited by West Virginia historians as the founder of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . In Johnson 's bill , the legislature agreed that " all deaf and dumb and blind youth , residents of the state of West Virginia , between the ages of six and twenty @-@ five years , shall be admitted to pupilage in the institution on application to the principal until the institution is filled . "

= = = Institution site selection = = =

After the bill 's passage Johnson was appointed by Governor Stevenson to the institution 's inaugural Board of Regents , which convened in Wheeling on April 20 , 1870 . Johnson and his fellow board members began a competition among West Virginia municipalities for the location of the new institution for the deaf and blind ; the three finalists were Wheeling , Parkersburg and Romney . The board selected Wheeling , which offered its Female College campus . However , after the board 's adjournment Female College supporters , unwilling to see the school closed , pressured city authorities to rescind their offer . At the board 's June 23 , 1870 meeting , Johnson and his colleagues unanimously selected Romney 's proposal offering the Romney Classical Institute campus and an adjoining 15 acres ( 6 @.@ 1 ha ) of property on behalf of the Romney Literary Society . When the institution 's site was finalized , the board reconvened on July 20 , 1870 in Romney at the old Romney Classical Institute campus and selected its academic faculty and personnel . H. H. Hollister of the Ohio Institution for the Deaf and Blind was chosen as the school 's

first principal , and Johnson was appointed principal teacher of its School for the Blind .

= = Career at the school = =

The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind began their first academic session on September 29 , 1870 with an enrollment of thirty students : twenty @-@ five were deaf and five blind . After the school 's first academic year , Board of Regents secretary Robert White wrote in his report to Governor Stevenson : " Professor Johnson , in the instruction of the blind , has displayed a marked ability which is showing , and will show , good results in the department . " Johnson represented the new school in 1871 at the inaugural convention of the American Association for Instructors of the Blind , and in 1876 he provided large maps used to teach his blind students as part of West Virginia 's exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia . The exposition was the first world 's fair hosted in the United States , and the first since West Virginia became a state in 1863 .

During Johnson 's twenty @-@ seventh year of teaching at the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , he framed a bill for the West Virginia Legislature which would separate the institution into two schools : one for the deaf and one for the blind . It read in part : " Be it enacted , That the West Virginia schools for the deaf and the blind , located at Romney , in the county of Hampshire , shall , after the expiration of the present term , that is to say after the 15th day June , 1897 , cease to be a school for the education of deaf and blind youth , and shall thereafter be a school for the education of deaf youth only " , and would provide a separate school for the blind . Despite Johnson 's active support for the bill , it failed to pass . In 1892 he wrote an article which was published in the Perkins Institute for the Blind publication The Mentor , " Keep the Schools Out of Politics " , decrying the appointment of school administrators , educators and trustees on the institute 's Board of Regents based on affiliation with the West Virginia Democratic Party instead of qualifications .

Johnson taught in the school 's blind department continuously for 43 years , until his death in 1913 . He was the subject of an April 1899 article in The West Virginia School Journal , where he was described as " still in sound health and vigor " and " cheerful and patient " after 29 years of teaching . Despite his efforts to establish the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind and his long tenure , Johnson earned a minimal salary which enabled him to " eke out a bare living . " During his career , he acquired a " working knowledge of several languages , a wide range of scientific knowledge , and of mathematics . " In the 1897 History of Hampshire County , West Virginia : From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present , Hu Maxwell and Howard Llewellyn Swisher wrote about Johnson :

= = Writing = =

In addition to his career as an academic and educator , Johnson was a prolific writer of prose and verse . He was elected to the Romney Literary Society , which donated its buildings and the grounds of the Romney Classical Institute to the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind after its establishment in 1870 .

His poems include :

" A Question "

" Blindness "

" Intuitive Love "

" Hymn to Spring "

= = Personal life = =

In 1868 Johnson married Ms. Barbee of Virginia , and they had three children : Leila B. Johnson , William T. Johnson and H. Guy ( or Howard H. ) Johnson . His wife died in 1880 , and his children from his first marriage were raised by their grandparents in Bridgewater , Virginia . In 1882 Johnson married Elizabeth Neale , the daughter of Hamlet V. Neale of Keyser . He and Elizabeth had two children : George N. Johnson and Lucy N. Johnson . Johnson died as a result of paralysis on February 8 , 1913 in Romney , and is buried in its Indian Mound Cemetery .

