

THE HISTORY OF JOHNSTON

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Compiled by the eighth grade
Civics class of 1954 from
data gathered from pioneer
settlers of Johnston.

Edited by Mr. and Mrs. Herrick
Dedicated to the future classes
of Johnston High.

RIBBON & CARBON SUPPLY COMPANY, DES MOINES, IOWA

THE HISTORY OF JOHNSTON

During the Civil War, most of the land which now comprises the community of Johnston, was part of the 1200 acre Robinson ranch. This land was later to be bought and divided into acreages to form the present lay-out of the community.

In 1880, school was held for the children of the area at Lawson school, located one mile east of the present school building, and the Ridgedale school on the present Wigton property.

In 1888, the first post office and grocery store, operated by Jake Randolph, were located on the Harold Wigton property. This post office was discontinued in 1903 when Grimes began R.F.D delivery service by horse and buggy.

About this time, a blacksmith shop was established at the present Mott Hammond residence with Sam Hunt as proprietor. The shop later moved to Johnston where the George Witts now reside.

Many of the first homes built in the area still survive. The seventeen room Robinson house was by far the largest and was located at the present Weatherspoon residence. Here also was located the largest barn in the community at that time. Ed Kinsey lived at the present William Gilbert residence, George Rittgers at Olsaskys, Mike Rittgers at Charles Rittgers, N.J. Otto at Wilmer Newlins, R.A. Wilson at the Pioneer Club house, the Friars at the Manny farm and J.A. Rittgers at the H.D. Minnick residence. In all there were about twenty-five homes in the Johnston area when the interurban started its run in 1905 between Des Moines and Perry. The interurban station was built across the track from Miller's station and Bill Morgan ran a store in conjunction with the station. With the coming of the interurban came a name for this area through which it passed. The area was named Johnston after the freight superintendent of the railway.

In 1906 the development of Johnston began with the Hayes grocery store which was built on the present site of the Feed Store. This year also brought telephone service via Grimes which has been replaced in most of the community by Des Moines service.

1908. Fruitland and Brennan Drives originated. Fruitland is now 57th Avenue, and Brennan, now 55th Avenue

1912. The Iowa Loan and Trust Company bought the Robinson ranch and divided it

1913. Research was begun by H.A. Wallace and J.J. Newlin for Pioneer Hybrid.

This company was to be one of the main developmental factors in Johnston's growth.

1914. The second consolidated school district in Polk County was formed which included all the surrounding one-room school houses and the district was called the Independent Consolidated School District of Webster and Jefferson Townships of Polk County, Iowa. The first board of directors included J.F. Grace, John Lansley, Burn Snider, Robert A. Wilson, B.B. Dewey, F. Roenfield, and N.J. Otto. School was held for a time in the church basement prior to the building of the school. A little more than four acres of land was purchased where the present high school now stands in March 1915, a contract was awarded for the construction of the new building which was partially completed for the opening of school that September. The school consisted of eight grades. The first principal was Martin J. Albers and first teachers were Grace Brookover and Elsie Cashman, who had taught in the old school houses. In 1917, more territory was added to the school district and the name was changed to the Consolidated Independent District of Johnston, Iowa. At this time an addition was added to the school building and ten grades were established.

1917. This year also saw the construction of Merle Hay road, named in honor of the first Iowan killed in World War I and this year saw Camp Dodge come into use as an army Camp.

1918. A.F. Rittgers' grocery store was built on the site of the present Highway Commission office. The lumber yard was built - then owned by Ganfields.

1920. Robinette's station was built then owned by Paul Alley. This station is now the present DX Station on Merle Hay Rd. This year too, the school established twelve grades, became an accredited high school, and held its first graduation.

1922. Otto's station was built.

1923. Pioneer experimental farm began. Worthy Surbur's barber shop was built this year and is still now in use under a new management. The U.S. Government established a post office at Johnston.

1925. The present Federated Church (basement) was built.

1927. Miller's station was built. This is now the Texaco Station.

1940. Johnston's fire protection began. The first major fire was the Scholes Flour

1942. The old Waterbury land was purchased by Hobert A. Ross and given to the Y.M.C.A. for a boy's home which opened in March, 1943 and was managed by Mr. and Mrs. Walt Wheeler. Also in this year Johnston received a considerable increase in electric power.

1944. The Lion's Club was started by Mr. Hartman although it was not chartered until 1945. This club has done much for the school and community since its origin.

1950. The modern bus finally pushes the interurban almost completely out of the picture and another addition is added to the High School building consisting of ten classrooms and a new gymnasium.

1953. The old gymnasium in the school was divided and made into three classrooms and a lunchroom.

1958. First 10-room unit of the Elementary School was opened for the second semester.

Johnston is constantly expanding as Des Moines pushes its influence farther out in every direction.