

## **Historical Information on August Johnson and Lydia Helin and their Families.**

### **Part 3: IN MATLOCK - Beginning in 1892.**

#### **Frank Helin and August Johnson settle on homesteads:**

January 27th, 1892 August Johnson filed an application<sup>1</sup> for a homestead of 160 acres in an area that was called Grove at that time, west of Shelton, WA. August's homestead was in south east Mason County about 9 miles south of the town of Matlock and 10 miles north of the town of Satsop.

Frank Helin, filed application for his homestead in 1892 also. Frank Helin's homestead was on the East Fork of the Satsop river one mile below the Simpson Salmon Hatchery. Herbert Helin recalls that his father hired two Indians to slash 40 acres. Most of his land was across the river and this created problems. These homesteads came under the Homestead law<sup>2</sup> which required them to live on the land and develop it as a farm.

#### **The August Johnson's:**

August built a log cabin on his land at first. His homestead papers state that he began residence on it June 27th, 1892. These papers also say that his first house was 10 x 11 and 9 x 10 feet. This was probably the log house. To get water at the house, he dug a well 55 feet deep by hand! He cribbed the well (lined the sides) with cedar boards.<sup>3</sup> Before he was married, he would leave the farm for short periods to take a job somewhere to earn some money. But after he was married, he worked on the homestead and lived there continuously.

From the time that Annie reached Stillwater in May of 1891, until she traveled west and married August, she was employed, probably as a domestic in someone's home. In April of 1892 her father and mother and her sister Hulda all arrived in Stillwater for a visit.<sup>4</sup> 15 months later, her mother and father returned to Sweden in September of 1893 and lived on their son Frans August's farm.<sup>5</sup>

Hannah "Annie" Johnson came the rest of the way west from Stillwater in 1894<sup>6</sup> and she and August were married in Tacoma. Their oldest son Arvid was born Dec 13, 1895 while they were living in the log cabin.

In October 1899,<sup>7</sup> August began the final application papers to get the "patent" or deed to his homestead. This included his being issued a "Certificate of Citizenship" by the Superior Court of Mason County on October 18, 1899. Apparently the fees for the application were \$22.00.

Affidavits dated Dec 1, 1899 provide additional facts about August's farm at that time: He had been raising crops on it for 7 years and had about 10 acres cleared and fenced and under cultivation. The house was a one and 1/2 storey wood frame house 22 x 28 feet in size with two porches. From family recollections, we know that he built this house from lumber which he split by hand from one large fir tree on their place. He also had a barn 30 x 46 feet, a milk house, a work shop, wood shed, and chicken houses. He had also planted 60 fruit trees. He and his witnesses valued the farm at \$1000.00 at that time. The "patent" or deed is dated May 14, 1900.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the affidavit, he had two children. During the 12 years after their first son was born, they added four more children to their family for a total of six. Three boys and three girls.



**The Frank Helins:**

The river dividing Frank Helin's homestead caused problems for him. One time he nearly drowned crossing the river when it was high. So in 1902, after he had received the patent to his 160 acres, he sold his homestead and bought a farm of 80 acres a few miles away which was much better. The farm already had a house on it. This was located five miles north of August's homestead. Then he began thinking about a wife.

August's sister Lydia left Sweden in 1901. Her other sisters were all married by then and Herbert<sup>9</sup> recalls that: "They would invite her to come and visit them and baby sit their children for nothing. She got tired of that so she left and came to America." At first she stayed near her sister Anna in the Chicago area. There she worked for \$6 a month and board.

Herbert Helin said that In 1902 Frank wrote Lydia.<sup>10</sup> He had grown up in the same area of Småland as Lydia and August, but he hadn't seen Lydia for about 15 years. He told her in his letter about the tough times she would have in the pioneer setting if she came out and married him. But I guess it wasn't any worse than just \$6 a month in Chicago. Of course it would be pleasant to live near her brother August and his family.

So Lydia decided to go west July 20, 1903. She wanted Frank Helin to go to Chicago so they could be on the train together. But he wrote back that it was a wet Spring and it was taking more time to clear land to plant potatoes. So he sent her the money for the train ticket which was \$33 from Chicago to Tacoma on the Northern Pacific. They were probably married in Tacoma. Then they took a boat from Tacoma to Olympia and came overland from there to Matlock.

They had two children: Herbert and Linnea.<sup>11</sup>

**School for the Children:**

Each of August's children began school in a one room school house called the "Wayside School". (This place doesn't exist today.) It was about 1 1/2 miles north of their house. The children walked to school. Arvid, the oldest, finished 8th grade there. (These rural schools typically had one teacher who taught grades one through eight to the children in the nearby area.)

Herbert began school in 1910 and his sister, Linnea, who is one year younger, began the following year. They attended school in another rural school house which today is known as Mary M Knight school. Since this school is only about 1/4 mile from the Helin house they usually walked home for lunch. Also, they often had a teacher boarding in their home. The original school building has been torn down now, but the second one, built in 1909 still stands and is now a museum.<sup>12</sup>

**Transportation:**

The most common form of transportation in this area at that time, was walking. The children walked to School. August walked to many places in the area. Itinerant preachers traveled on foot, etc. This seems strange to us today, since we commonly think in terms of driving anyplace more than a block or two away. But in my research, stories abound of people getting from one area to another on foot.

Herbert still has a horse drawn "buggy", as it is commonly called, though the correct name is a "surrey". This was used by the family in the early years if they wished to go somewhere together. Both



families had a team of horses which were used primarily for work, but they would use them to pull the surrey for a family trip. Herbert's surrey has been well cared for and is still in good condition.<sup>13</sup> The August Johnson family had one that was similar. It has three bench seats. The back one can be removed for more cargo space. My dad recalls that on the buggy their family owned, they had curtains around the area where they rode. This kept out the rain. It also had a fringe around the top.

Herbert recalls that, "Sometimes my Uncle August would walk to the Matlock store for groceries. Then when the logging train going to Port Blakely came by the store he jumped a ride home. There was a slight grade at one place which slowed the train down so he could jump off not far from his place."

The only transportation to Seattle in those early years was by boat. These were paddlewheel powered with steam.<sup>14</sup>

### **Clearing the Land and Farming:**

The largest trees had been logged off the area around Matlock before August acquired his homestead. However this had not cleared the land sufficiently for planting crops. So he kept clearing more fields on their place. Later when his sons got big enough, they helped him with this task.

They planted fruit trees and harvested apples and prunes and other fruits in their own orchard which they canned each summer in glass jars. They grew berries and picked wild ones and made jams and jellies. They raised vegetables which they stored for the winter for the family to eat. They raised their own meat and butchered it themselves. They kept a few cows to have milk and other dairy products for the family. They churned their own butter, made their own cottage cheese, etc. They raised chickens and had their own eggs, etc. They raised hay which they stored in the barn, and each year grew a field of oats or other grain to feed their livestock. They cut and chopped their own firewood for burning in wood stoves in the house to heat it in the winter.

The children all shared in the chores and the work on the farm. The girls worked in the garden, the house, and sometimes the light chores in the barn. August taught his boys to do the heavy work for the girls. The boys also worked in the garden, the fields, and in clearing additional land.

My dad recalls that, "the principle means of income for our family was raising potatoes and vegetables to sell. Especially potatoes." After a few years of this, however, the potatoes were attacked by the flea beetle which left the potatoes with scabs. Potential customers were no longer interested in buying them. So they changed to raising chickens and selling the eggs. Later they primarily sold milk and cream. "We could sell these farm products to the logging camps or in town. Farmers were better off than working men in those days."

There was little money in the early days especially, but they didn't go hungry. Often if you couldn't grow it or make it yourself, you did without it. This kind of upbringing taught good character qualities to my father and my aunts and uncles. They worked hard, were thrifty, told the truth, etc. They in turn tried to pass these values on to their children.



**Family Visits:**

When the two families of Lydia and August lived near each other in the Matlock area, they would get together for special events. The holidays of Christmas and July 4th were always special times to get together. There were other occasions as well. Sometimes they would just get together for a picnic.

There are several old photographs taken on such family outings with both families present. Often the occasions which appear in pictures are times when someone visited them. One such special event was a visit from Annie's sister Ellen from Stillwater MN. Pictures of this visit were sent to Sweden to the family there as well.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most unusual photograph is when they all posed in front of a huge burned out stump during a visit from Ellen. Herbert recalls<sup>16</sup> that this stump was on the Metzgar's place. They would go there and have a picnic. Frank Helin would get the coffee prepared by boiling it in a can over a ampfire.

**August's Skills:**

August had good skills in those things necessary to being a good farmer. He took good care of his livestock, knew how to store the various products they raised for their own use, etc. He also had good logging skills. He knew how to cut trees, make them into lumber, etc. He taught these skills to his children as they worked with him on the farm. Frank Helin had similar skills, though he didn't do as much finish carpentry work as August.

August was also a good craftsman. He not only built the buildings on his homestead in Matlock but he made his own lumber for the Matlock house and barn. As mentioned above, he split the lumber for their house there from one large fir tree. My dad recalls that his dad made his own hand plane for planing the lumber.

He made furniture, cabinets, even a wood baby carriage with spoked wheels! This baby carriage is in a museum in Olympia today. A kitchen cabinet which he built for his sister Lydia at the Helin home is still in use today. He built a baby bed which was used by all of Arvid's children, then by Arvid's oldest son, Wesley's children, and now by Wesley's grandchildren. These show his skill as a finish carpenter and wheelwright.

**Family worship:**

It wasn't feasible to travel any distance with the family for attending church and there were no churches of any kind nearby. So August Johnson led his family in worship at home. Many years later when they had a car and there were better roads, they drove to church.

Herbert Helin recalls that when his uncle August still lived in the Matlock area that he started a Sunday School on Sunday afternoons in the school near the Helin home. The Helin family and a few others would attend and his Uncle August led the group. Later when August and his family moved to the valley, August met an itinerant preacher who came through that area once a month. He sent him to the Helin home as well as welcoming him at their place in the valley. They would hold a service in the school house when he was there.



**Use of Swedish in their parental homes:**

The older children of August learned some Swedish, but the youngest ones didn't learn anything but a few words. My father and his sister Emily are the two youngest. They think their parents switched to English about the time that the oldest, Arvid, began attending school which was before they were born.

They recall that there were several books in their home though they don't call it a library. They mention that their father, August, read to them from an English Bible at all their meals. Also, he read them sermons in English from books of sermons by preachers like D.L. Moody (a well known American evangelist who died in 1899) and Charles Spurgeon, and perhaps others.<sup>17</sup>

There were very few Swedes in the area where August settled. He apparently switched to English very early in his time here in the USA for all of his dealings with neighbors, etc.

Lydia and Frank Helin's home was different in their use of Swedish. Herbert Helin, learned Swedish as a boy. He says he can still carry on a conversation in Swedish.

Aunt Emily recalls interesting details on the use of Swedish by August, Lydia, and Anna and their families. She says, "I was the tail end of the family. I can understand only a few words of Swedish. Aunt Anna taught them to me after I moved to Chicago as she 'felt so sorry for me.' Her children, Ingaborg and Albin talked to their mother and dad all the time in the home in Swedish. That's a mistake, they shouldn't do that. They're so Scandinavian! Aunt Anna would talk to me in Swedish, and I'd say, 'Oh, aunt Anna, I'm so sorry, I don't understand what you said.' And she'd say, 'Oh you poor thing.' She used to feel so sorry for me. But I was sorry for her. Though she could speak English, she didn't talk English very much."

"My dad must have decided he should learn the language of the country he's living in. I think he's right. We kids went to school and we got English there."

"When we went to Aunt Lydia's place, they talked Swedish to their children, too. Linnea and Herbert would answer her in Swedish. Not always. They would mix it with English too. They were in English schools, of course. When we could visit over there, Aunt Lydia would be talking to my father in Swedish and he would answer her in English!"

"Dad's sisters (Anna and Lydia) wanted to hold to the original language. My cousin Linnea would laugh sometimes when my father would talk Swedish to her mother. Sometimes in his talking Swedish, he'd put some English words in there! She thought that was so funny."

August's sisters obviously had a different view on this than he did. He must have had a strong determination to learn English and speak it well. I wonder if he studied English before he came to the USA. No one I have asked about this remember him talking about how he learned English.

**The Helin Family:**

The Helin family never left Matlock. In 1913 Frank Helin enlarged their house to it's present size. He hired 3 carpenters. The head carpenter lived in Shelton and rode out the 20 miles to Matlock on Monday on a bicycle and slept in a tent in the yard. He went home to Shelton on the weekend. He was paid \$4.50 a day and his 2 helpers were paid \$3 a day. Planed, old growth lumber, was \$12 for a thousand board feet. The total cost of the addition was \$840.00.



Herbert worked on the farm after he finished 8th grade and didn't go to High School. Linnea went to high school in Elma.

Frank Helin died in 1931 of cancer and is buried in Shelton. Lydia lived several years after he died. Her children stayed with her on the home place, caring for her and running the farm. Lydia died in 1945 and is buried in Shelton.

In 1946 Herbert married Violet Martin, a music teacher from Elma. (She was born in Elma, Dec 5, 1911.) They stayed on his parent's place in Matlock. He continued to farm this place. He says there isn't much money in farming, however. Violet worked for a while as a music teacher. And in addition to farming, Herbert drove school bus for the Mary M Knight school for 17 years. He sold the farm to my cousin, Wesley, a few years ago with the agreement that he could live there as long as he needed to. He helped care for things there until Feb of 1997 when his health indicated he should move to an "assisted living" apartment in Shelton. Wesley farms the place now. One of his sons lives in the old house now with his family. He has remodelled the house, keeping some of the old and adding some new things that were needed.

Herbert and his wife Violet were married 36 years. She died August 25, 1982 at the age of 70 and is buried in Shelton.

Linnea married Max Nilsson and moved to Seattle where she and Max worked and lived out their lives. They are both dead now and are buried in Seattle in the Acacia cemetery. Neither Herbert nor Linnea have any children.

#### **August's and Frank's houses:**

Neither of the two houses which August built survive today. They both burned after the family moved out of them. The homestead house in Matlock burned after they sold the place and moved out. The workmen fixing it up for the new owners accidentally started the fire.

Though I don't remember it, I was one of the last Johnson family members to live in the old home place in the Skokomish valley. My parents, Sigurd and Elvera Johnson, lived there for two years after they were married. I was born during this time and lived there with them until I was about 1 year of age. When they left, the place was rented out to others. Eventually, a renter accidentally burned the house down. A number of things the family had stored in the attic were destroyed in this fire. Some years later this place was also sold to others. It has been divided up now into smaller farms.

Both barns which August built were replaced by newer buildings by the new owners. Wesley has preserved a few pieces of the barn in the Skokomish Valley. They show the kind of materials August used to build the barn when he moved there in 1913.

Partly because these Johnson buildings are gone, the Helin farm is a special historic place to me and others in the Johnson family. (Note: We believe that August helped build the Helin barn. He also built the bathroom onto the back of the house when indoor plumbing was added. This had to be replaced when the house was remodelled in 1997.) Though the two houses and barns that August built on his two farms no longer survive, these buildings on the Helin farm are still there. They were used continuously by the Helin family for 95 years. This is an unusual situation not commonly found in the USA in these days.

Wesley bought the Helin farm to keep this historic place in the Johnson family. I am grateful that he did. Though repairs and remodelling have been necessary, he and his son have preserved many of the historic distinctives of the house, etc. Many historic and antique items were found in the house. Some of these have been distributed to different family members. We have taken family members from Sweden and other parts of the country there to see the "old" place.



Written 8/93. - Revised 9/00 by David S. Johnson  
 Printed 09/11/00

## FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> I obtained a copy of his "Homestead Affidavit" of this date which was filed in the Land Office in Olympia. This was Homestead application No. 695. Frank Helin's was application No. 696. He seems to have refiled additional copies of this Nov 21, 1892. I have copies of both.

In 1994 Tina Shaw lived on the former homestead of August. Her parents purchased it from August, and she inherited it when her parents died.

<sup>2</sup> In 1862, While Abraham Lincoln was president, the congress of the USA passed an act which granted public land not to exceed 160 acres to any citizen or alien intending to become a citizen, to be developed as a farm.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Helin dug a similar well, but only had to go down 33 feet at the farm where Herbert lives now. These hand dug wells were filled in many years later and replaced with drilled wells and electric pumps.

<sup>4</sup> Wesley asked me once whether I found any evidence that Annie came from a wealthier family than August. Several of us remember mention that her family didn't approve of her marrying August. And we understood the idea was that August came from a poorer family than Annie did. In my visit to Sweden and my examination of the Swedish church records there, the two families in Sweden had very little difference in resources there. They were both poor farming families.

I can't prove it with family recollections, etc, but I believe this story came from this visit to Stillwater by her parents. Stillwater was a well established town with a hospital, schools, churches, saw mill, stores, etc. Riverboats had been traveling this far on the river for over 40 years and now there were railroads. She had other family members there in Stillwater at that time who no doubt had good homes and good jobs. Her brother Fred, who was two years younger than her, had made a trip to the Northwest. While on that trip, he bought a big revolver which he said was for protection from the Indians. (One of his grand sons has this revolver today.) I don't know the exact date of his trip, but if he gave his report of his impressions of the Northwest about this time, this would no doubt have raised concern on the part of her parents for her safety.

I imagine that a discussion with Annie about her plan to go west and marry August would have raised this question of her safety. They probably also pointed out the contrast between the fine houses in Stillwater and the log cabin that August had built on a homestead.

<sup>5</sup> In January 1896, her sister Hulda also returned to Sweden. She became a teacher and taught English in Sweden. Many years later she visited the family in Stillwater again. There is a large family photo taken then that includes most of the family in that area. I think there are more than 30 in the photo, all on Annie's side of the family. (Annie didn't go to this family gathering. I believe she was ill at the time.) (See the next chapter.)



<sup>6</sup> An affidavit for the homestead, dated Dec 1, 1889 says August had been married for 5 years.

<sup>7</sup> I have copies of these papers as well.

<sup>8</sup> The homestead of 160 acres had a legal description of: The East half of the NE quarter, the SW quarter of the NE quarter, and the SW quarter of the SE quarter of Section 18, Township 19 North, of Range 6 West of the Willamette principal Meridian of Washington.

<sup>9</sup> Herbert is Frank Helin's son. He has a good memory and was willing to talk about his memories of his parents, etc. He was a valuable source of information for this write up.

<sup>10</sup> He found these details in the letters that they wrote to each other.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert was born in March 1904 and Linnea in April 1905.

<sup>12</sup> Today the school site has been enlarged, and new buildings and other facilities added. Approximately 250 students from around the area are bused to this location for Elementary and High school daily.

<sup>13</sup>. When they bought a Model T Ford and stopped using the surrey, they hung it from the rafters in the barn to keep it out of the way and in the dry.

<sup>14</sup> Today you can drive to Seattle on good highways in about two and a half hours or drive part way and take a ferry across the Puget Sound.

<sup>15</sup> See Part 4: Contact with Sweden.

<sup>16</sup> He told about this in a visit in his home July 2, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Spurgeon ministered in England, but his sermons were widely published and available here in the USA. D.L.Moody preached in evangelistic crusades in many places in the US, and also traveled to England more than once. His closest crusade to Washington state was in Portland Oregon, but took place before August reached this area.