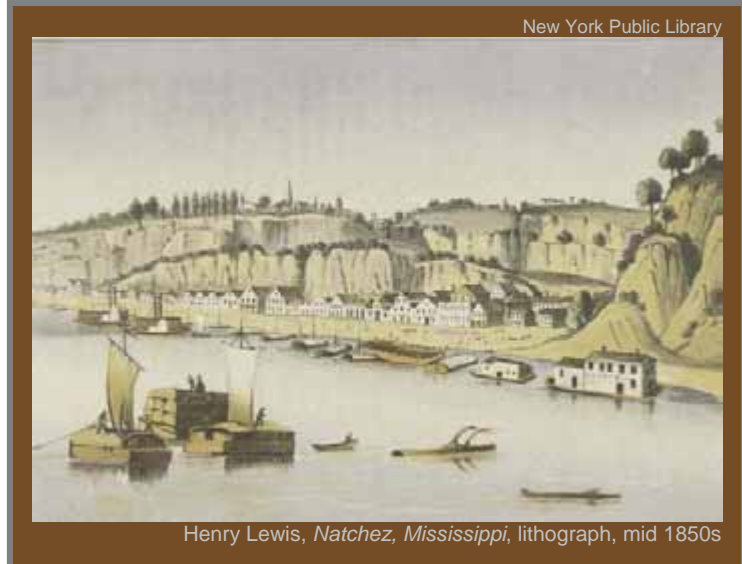




Diary of William Johnson

Free Black Businessman Natchez, Mississippi

Diary Selections from
Jan. 1, 1838 – Jan. 1, 1844



Born a slave in 1809, William Tiler Johnson was freed in 1820 by his owner (most likely his father) who had earlier freed his mother and sister. He became an apprentice barber in the Mississippi River town of Natchez and in 1830 took over his brother-in-law's barbershop. In 1835 he married Amy Battles, also a free person of color, with whom he had eleven children.

In 1835 Johnson began a personal diary to record his daily activities and financial affairs. He operated several barber shops and a bathhouse, owned land and buildings which he rented out, and regularly loaned money at interest to black and white men alike. He was also a slaveowner, as were many other free blacks in the South. In 1851 Johnson was murdered in a land dispute. These diary entries span six years from 1838 to 1844, when Johnson was in his late twenties and early thirties.

1838

January 1, 1838 Buisness has been very Lively and a very greate Quantity of persons in town to day — Mr. Edward Thomas paid me to day fifty Dollars. It was a debt that Mr Marshall, the portraite Painter, Owed me for House rent and he gave me an Order on the Estate of Mr William Arllettes To day it was paid me by Mr. Arllette. Messrs Barlow & Taylor paid me To day One Hundred Dollars, money that I Loaned him a short time ago. They also paid me \$15 that I Loaned them a good while ago — Mr John P. Smith Took Charge of the Mansion House, To night I Let all the Boys go to the theatre or Circus

Mssrs:
Messieurs,
i.e., Sirs

Boys:
Johnson's
slaves
and free
black
appren-
tices

...
January 10, 1838 Auctions to day at Sprague & Howells and at Dolbeares¹ and at Sorias To day, the things belonging to the Estate of Mr. Sml Mason — I bot a pair [of] and Irons, tongs and poker, One spider² and one Oven The Concern only cost 1.50. Very Cheap — Dr Samuel Hogg paid me to day \$19.50 for his shaving bill up to this date and I paid him Eleven dollars that I owed him for Medical Services up to this date — \$7 of the amount was for Mother

...
February 11, 1838 To day I went Out into the woods with my Gun and I Killed 10 Robbins, 2 Rice Birds, and 4 yellow Hammers, and I Only went Out at 1 Oclock. Mc went Out too, some w[h]ere in the nighboughhood of Minors pasture and Only Killed 4 Birds. Mr Armat Returns from Jackson and brings with him a Black Eye. He said it was hurt by a Dr Aiken or Hagan. The[y] had a small fight at the States House steps in Jackson. He sead that he Knocked the Fellow Down flat. Mr. Armatt paid me five Dollars to day on his acct. for hair cuting &c.

Mc:
Robert
McCary,
longtime
friend, also
a freed
slave and
barber

National Humanities Center, 2007: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/. Selections from *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*, eds. William Ransom Hogan & Edwin Adams Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1993). Copyright © 1951, 1979 © by Edwin Adams Davis and Jane C. Hogan. Footnotes from Hogan & Davis. Images and sidenotes added by NHC (sidenotes based on the 1951 Hogan & Davis introduction and the 1993 William L. Andrews introduction). Permission pending. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/image_credits.htm.

¹F. H. Dolbeare & Co. conducted an auction-merchandise business located on Main Street. *Natchez Courier*, August 13, 1838.

²A spider was a frying pan or skillet, usually with legs.

...

February 28, 1838 Taxes Taxes I gave in my Tax List To day and it reads as follows

My two Lots value	\$10,000	
My Three Slaves	2,000	

12,000		12,000
Mother, three women and two children Slaves		1,650
Mrs Battles House and Lot 4,500 and Slave women		4,750

Mrs. Battle:
Johnson's
mother-
in-law

...

March 19, 1838 Buisness not very good. Steven got drunk Last night and went of[f] and remained all night and was not Here this morning to go to Market. I sent Bill Nix to the Jail to see if He was there and He was not there. I sent Him out to Dr Ogdons and in going there He found Him and brought Him Down and Left Him in the gate and he Jumped over the Fence and went threw in Judge Montgomerys yard. Bill He ran around the Corner and found him and brought Him in, I Kept him [in] the shop a Little while and then sent him to Help Mrs Lieper to move from the old House Down to the House belonging to Bill Hazard He ran off 4 times in about three hours and Bill Nix Caught Him Every time, so He Brought Him Home after a while and I went to the stable and gave him a pretty sefveere thrashing with the Cow hide — then he was perfectly Calm and Quite and could then do his work. Tis singular how much good it does some people to get whiped. Mr. Kenney paid me \$40.00 for One months House rent due to day, the 19th inst I then told him here after He could have the Room for \$35 per month

Steven:
one of
Johnson's
slaves

inst.
instant,
i.e., of the
current
month

...

March 27, 1838 Steven ran off Last night and God Only Knows where he has gone to, for I dont, tho if I should have the Good Luck to Get Him again I will be very apt to Hurt his Feelings — This is the second time he has ranaway in a week.

...

March 31, 1838 I got on my Horse Early this morning and wrode Out to Washington in search of Steven but Could not find Him at all I also went Out again in the afternoon to Becon Landing but could not hear of Him. During the time that I was in sea[r]ch of him He sent me word that if I would Only Let him off without whipping him that he would never runaway again Durring His Life

...

April 5, 1838 Buisness Quite dull. I got my Barrells to give Baths to day for the First time and Mr Ayres Called and took a Bath —The First this Season and paid the Cash for it I to day Saw a Man up at the auction Room and he wanted to buy my Girl Sarah. I told him he could have her for twelve Hundred Dollars in cash. I intend to see about it To morrow and if I can find out about him I will do something Peter Boisaw Open to day in the new Coffee House and to day was the day of the Collinizationest had a Large meeting and here is the names of some of the Leading Parties or Head Dogs in the Bone Yard — Tis a pitty that they [are] not doing something Else better for there Country [names omitted by diarist]³

dull,
i.e.,
slow

Johnson
operated a
four-tub
bathhouse
in addition
to his
barber
shop.

...

April 7, 1838 I felt a degree of Suspicion about a man that I thought from his Generall apearance, would if he Could, do me a Damage, that is, I thought He wanted to steal my Girl Sarah.

...

³Johnson was here expressing his opposition to the Mississippi Colonization Society, organized at Natchez in 1831 as an auxiliary of the American Colonization Society. The Mississippi organization had as its objective the removal of free Negroes from the state, preferably by sending them to Liberia. If Johnson had named some of the "Leading Parties or Head Dogs in the Bone Yard," he would have listed the officials of the society, which included wealthy and prominent Dr. Stephen Duncan of Natchez and a long list of individuals prominent in educational, religious, business, and political life. The total number of Mississippi Negroes sent to Africa before 1860 was between 550 and 600, but probably at least 500 of these were slaves freed by their owners with the specific object of colonization. Most of the established group of free Negroes probably shared Johnson's attitude of opposition. [Footnote continues.]

April 12, 1838 To day was spent in Talk about the Duell that was to have Taken place this Evening between Col. Nickolds and Dr Booye They were to have fought between 4 and 5 Oclock this Evening — There was a Greate many Person assembled to see the Expected fight Crowds were On the Other Side and a Greate many were on this side trying to see and after all, those that remained seen as much as we that Crossed the River for shortly after we Got Over Dr Ker He got up on the Levee and there commenced a Long Harangue of Stuff which was seconded by the Elustrious Abby and The Hon. R. Patterson who is at this time One of the Bourd of Selectmen A Committee was appointed. The following Composed the Com — Abby, Patterson & Lucas — They were Dispatched fourth with to the Parties to state the Resolutions that Had been passed by the speaker and Crowd — 1st, that they Had resolved to follow those Gentleman and prevent there fighting on any part of the Ground — Well the time had passed when they were to have fought and still there was no preperations made that I could see for the fight when at last Here Came the Sherriff of La and stoped the Consern. They were held to bale in the sum of One Hundred Dollars to Keep the peace Col Nickolds were on the River Bank and the Dr was on the other side of the Road in the woods on a Log

April 13, 1838 The Large Town meeting that was to have Taken place to day on the Subject of Dueling appears to have been Neglected by the partees as there was no meeting at all. No person To Open the meeting. Tis well Enough

...

June 1, 1838 This has been decidely the dullest day we have seen for some time, Cegwin paid me One Months Shaving Due the First inst — I went to the Methodist Church and Listened on the Out Side of it at Mr. Maffitt Preaching — He is a splendid speaker, the best I Ever herd in all my Life⁴ — The heavy rain that we have had to day and yesterday has done a greate harm to the Planters in this County. Dr Duncan and Col Bingaman both has Lost a greate deal of Cotton and Labour

...

June 3, 1838 Mr H. A. Cegwin paid me to day Fifty Dollars. He Still owes me fifty Dollars more on a hundred Dollars that I Loaned him Some time ago

...

June 7, 1838 Fourteen Baths to day

June 8, 1838 Buisness Tolerable good

June 10, 1838 Good deal of Buisness in my Line, Bathing in particular I had to turn off a good many

...

June 12, 1838 Buisness Quite Dull, I thought, Only tolerable Dull, I was up at Soria Auction room to day and Bot 1 Sofa at \$34, 2 Large picture & Frames, \$4.25, 2 Kitchen Hand Irons, 1 Large Carpet, \$12.00 I paid Mc McFaddin \$100 for filling up my Lot up by the Rail Road — Maj Shields gets married to night to Miss Surget

...

June 20, 1838 To day Mother paid me one Hundred and twenty-five Dollars, which Leaves her Still in my debt Four hundred and Seventy Dollars to this date. The oven that I paid Mr Breeden for is not included in the above amount at all. It Cost me \$153.00 This is mine at any time, To



Washstand, bookcase, and canopy bed ascribed to William Johnson as owner

⁴The diarist was here referring to the Reverend John Newland Maffitt, renowned Methodist pulpit orator, who was delivering a series of sermons and addresses in Natchez. [Footnote continues.]

day or this Evening Young Bledsoe and Preacher Dixon has a sort of a fight The Particulars I have not herd. Bledsoe got a Bruised Eye and Dixon got nearly Knocked Down with a 4 pound w[e]ight — got his head cut a good Deal

...
June 23, 1838 To day has been a profitable day with me in the way of Bathing, 22 Baths
E Miller Came Down from Vicksburgh Late Last night on the S. B. Monarch

June 24, 1838 To day the Capt Miller Left here for Vicksburgh I went down To the River with Him, and staid untill he Left

June 27, 1838 I Bot of a Stranger to day 6000 Segars and paid him 28 Dollars a Thousand

...
July 1, 1838 Nothing New that I have herd of to day, I wrode Out to day to the old Field beyond Col Wilkins and Took my Riffle, and spent the Evening shooting at a mark, Mc Came Out also and we shot to gether all the Evening and to take our shooting altogether I Beat him about a fut

Johnson was friendly with numerous Mississippi River steamboat captains who stopped in Natchez.

...
September 6, 1838 To day I Bot a cow from Patrick Hurst for \$27 and I paid him the money Cash and the Rascal promised to take her back if did not Like Her and when I made the offer for him to take her back he would not, I pronounce him a Rascal

...
October 19, 1838 I gave Mr Tweksburg an order to Vancampen & Jones for Some Lumber and to Sislocs for some also — He then went to work Plaining of Planks and made about 3 qrts of a Days work — The Rain of yesterday Caused my new House to crack very considerable, that is from the top to the Botom on the Lower Side — Lawyer Baker and Lawyer Armat has a small fight to Day at Dinner at the Mansion House, To day a number of the Free Trader Containd the Seveerest piece against the Banks that I have Ever Seen From the pen of Mr John Hagan the article Eminated⁵

...
November 16, 1838 This morning quite Early I Came Down in my shop and found that the Boys had Just been smoking some of my Cegars which they Denied I Listened a while and was satisfied that they had stolen them I then Boxed Bills Jaws and Kicked his Back Side and I slaped Charles along side of the Head severall times

November 17, 1838 The Carpenters Finished puting on the Roof of my House to day. The Brick Layers have not finished the House yet

November 19, 1838 Mr. James Ballard Commences To do his Own Shaving Dr Davis moves from next Door and Takes his Horses from my Stable



C. Mahon, *Map of the Alluvial Region of the Mississippi*, 1861, detail of Mississippi River from Natchez to the Gulf of Mexico.

Steamboat travel between Natchez and New Orleans took about one to three days, the return trip against the river current taking longer (based on entries in Johnson's journal).

⁵The article [in an edition of the Natchez *Free Trader*] was a condemnation of "wildcat" banking practices.

November 20, 1838 Buisness better than it has been for some time past I Had a Settlement with Mr Elam & Stanford to Day for the Brick work of my New House The Bill for Brick work amounted to Nineteen Hundred and fifty seven Dollars and Eighty Cents I paid them and took a Receipt for the same

...

December 3, 1838 Mr Sisloff paid me \$50 that I Loaned Him on Saturday Last.

December 4, 1838 The Steam Boat Augusta was brought Down to Day by the Hail Columbia. She had Blown up Last night a few miles above this place, 49 Persons Shaved in my shop to Day

December 5, 1838 Fifty-six Persons shaved to Day in my shop

December 11, 1838 I paid in to Day One Hundred and seventy four Dollars and 53 cents on my R. Road Stock — this makes \$774.53 that I have paid in on my Stock, I moved Down to Mrs Battles This Evening

...

1839

January 24, 1839 My Little son William R. Johnson was Born three years ago this morning the 24 inst He is three years Old to this Date — The Cols Boy John Came Down from Jackson to Day — Left Jackson Yesterday

January 25, 1839 Nothing new that I Know of City Taxes — I Gave in my Property to day at those Rates — 2 town Lots, Value \$12000 — 2 Houses, 3 Slaves — 2000 — the amount in full \$14000, which is more in my Opinion than the Property would Bring at Auction in Cash — I was out this Evening to Shoot with my Pistol and I put two Balls in a Card out of nine shots

January 26, 1839 City Tax — I gave in Mothers 4 Slaves a[t] \$1000 and Mrs Battles Property at \$3000

...

February 16, 1839 Buisness has been very Good to Day. I went Out to the Race tract to Day and stayed nearly the whole afternoon out there. I made a greate many Bets of Different Kinds, and won in all forty One Dollars, twenty one of which was good, the other \$20 of Aaberdeen Planters Bank

...

February 21, 1839 Mr Robt. Smith Brought me His Little Boy to Day To See how I Liked Him To make a Barber Out of Him, The Late John Rex of North Carolina Died short time since and Gave fifteen thousand Dollars to Build an Infirmiry for the poor sick of Reighla or Raleigh — All his Slaves, twenty in number, to be Emancipated and to be Sent, if they are willing, to Liberia Under the patronage of the Collonization Society — He has provided ample means for the purpose

February 22, 1839 To night is the Grand Ball at Parkers Hotel. The Manergers of the Ball are all Bigist Kind of Bugs. I pd to Day fourteen Dollars for 43 Razors to Day I Bot them from Houghf at Sorias auction Room

February 23, 1839 Buisness of all Kinds very Dull. L David Paid me to Day the amount of his Shaving Bill for two years wich amounted to \$42 including Box Rent, and cuting Boys hair in all made it



Five-dollar note, Farmers and Merchants' Bank, Memphis, Tennessee, ca. 1854

Before a national currency was created in 1863, state banks issued their own paper money, which became worthless if the bank failed.

\$43.25 His Own account VS. me was \$16 and I Deducted \$3.25 for Lost time, which made his act 19.25, thus Left a Ballance in my favor of \$24 which he paid — Enough Said

...

March 2, 1839 Buisness not very Brisk The Boy Peter that has been with me 4 or five Days went Home and his Mother Brought Him back again an I told Her that she had better Keep him for I thought impossible to Lern him the trade and She took Him Home again

...

March 16, 1839 Buisness very Good

March 17, 1839 Buisness was pretty Good

March 18, 1839 Buisness very Good for the Season

March 19, 1839 Buisness good for Such times — I paid The House of E. Thomson & Co twenty nine Dollars, this being a Ballance of a note that I owed Mr Hutchison for a Lot [of] cigars that I Bot a Short time Ago for \$79 and I paid Hutcherson \$50 some time ago and the Ballance to Day to Thomson

March 20, 1839 I spent a good part of this Day at the Auction Room where the Marshall was Selling Out Mr O.Farrell and the Sherriff also, both at wonce

March 21, 1839 I spent a good part of the Day at the auction Room below at O Farrells Sale and Bot a number of things that I had have better Left alone

...

April 8, 1839 Buisness good in fore noon tho very Dull in the afternoon. Mc and mysefe played Sixteen Games at Marbles this Evening and He won ten Out of 16 and I have not been so tyred for some time As I am now from playing those Marbles

...

August 19, 1839 Very Dull in the way of Buisness — Mr Thomas Evans wal[k]ed over to Esqr. Robertiles office to Day and made othe [oath] to Wellingtons⁶ being a free Born Boy &c.

Esqr:
Esquire,
i.e., Mr.

&c.: etc.

Natchez August 16, 1839

To all who it may Concern. I do hereby Certify the Bearer of a Mullato Boy named Wellington West is a free Boy Born Free in Natchez in the year One thousand Eight hundred and Seventeen — His Mother was a woman of Black Completion named Judy West — was free and Lived in Natchez many years before her Death

William Parker

I with pleasure Concer in the above Certificate

Noah Barlow

also do I

J G Taylor . . .

...

September 1, 1839 Buisness not very Brisk as usual — This Morning was a Greate time among the Baptist People — Old Mrs Bondurant & a Miss Woodfork and three of the Miss Thomases were all Baptised in the River Just below the old Fort & in the afternoon there were Sixteen Darkeys Baptised at the same place and by the same man — Mr Bradley — the 16 Darkeys were all Baptised in the time that he Baptised the 5 Ladies in the Morning

September 2, 1839 Buisness dull — nothing new — Yellow fever Still very bad in New Orleans — I went this Evening in to the Buyio in Company with Mc & Basanett to shoot with Pistols and they had their Pistols and I Beat them all with Ease — Mc has a Large Pistol of P. Michells and I Discover in a short time that he will be very hard to Beat with it — I Reced One Letter from Mrs Miller to day — Mr A Kenney assumed the amount that Mr Whip Owed me — Seventy Dollars

Buyio, i.e.,
bayou

Reced, i.e.,
received

Mrs Miller:
Johnson's
sister Adelia
in New
Orleans

September 3, 1839 Our town is very healthy at present and we Lern that the Sickness is

⁶This was Wellington West, free mulatto, who worked intermittently in Johnson's barbershop. Son of Judy West, free woman of color, he was born in Natchez about 1817 and in 1841 was licensed by the Adams County Police Board to remain in the state. He also appears to have traveled up and down the Mississippi River with considerable freedom, probably as a barber on a steamboat. [Footnote from earlier reference to West, p. 261.]

much worse in Orleans instead of a change for the better — God help them for I cannot

September 4, 1839 Buisness Dull — I had a match to Day with Jno Greek for a pair of shoes — 3 best in five with Pistols — and I won the shoes Easy — not so Easy Either for we had to shoot a good many times more than the match — Mr Spelmaman gave his note to day for 170 dolls, 60 Days after Date

September 5, 1839 This Morning about 3 Oclock I was awakened by the Cry of Fire, Fire — I got up and ran with all possible Speed and found The Fire Burning on a stable up in Cotten Ally formily Kyles Ally — it then spread Out in Different Dirrections and both Sids of the Ally was on fire at the same time — I comme[nc]ed to work on the Cotton that was in the shed With the help of others got it all out and at Least the One half Burned up afterward. It Burned Down the following Houses — Messrs Jacob Sorias, 2 Story Ware House, Messrs. Stanton, Buckner & Com 2 Story Commission & Ware house, also their Large Cotton Shed⁷



Natchez-under-the-Hill, Mississippi, in Edward King, The Great South, 1875

September 6, 1839 This morning or Last night we had the alarm of Fire Given. I got up and ran with all possible speed and found it to [be] Mrs. W B Howells Dwelling House with stores underneath all on a full Blaze. I at wonce thought that my Little Effects would be Burned up without Doubt for the then Fearfull Element had the appearance of Breaking Out on Main St. I was for a time so bewildered that I Could not Commence to work at first. The Fireman of the City in this Case did perform wonders. They Extinguished the fire when for a Long time no one could have Reasonably hoped such a thing. The People are very much Jaded from the Labour Done Last night by them at the other fire Thank God I have wonce more Escaped, wonce more from Distruction⁸

September 7, 1839 Large Barbacue and Shooting match this Evening out at Washington on this fore noon — Greate many Persons out theare I am told

September 8, 1839 Buisness good Report Seys to night that there were 4 Deaths of *Yellow Fever* in Our Hospital to day.

September 9, 1839 Considerable Excitement about the Cases of Yellow Fever that occured Yesterday at the Hospitle and tis Said that there are ten or fifteen Cases of Sickness now at Different Places under the Hill— I insured my new Brick House to day at the Natchez Insureance Company in the sum of three Thousand Dollars, 1 ½ per Cent, in all \$46.50⁹ . . .

...

September 17, 1839 Several persons or Families has Left the City for the Country I wrode Out myself to the Quigless place to See how it would Suit to Live out thare in Case of much Sickness in

⁷The Natchez *Free Trader*, September 6, 1839, gave a complete account of the "Disastrous Conflagration." The fire destroyed a large number of stores and brick warehouses in the block bounded by Pearl, Franklin, Commerce and Main streets, which was perhaps the most valuable business area in Natchez. None of the stores facing Main Street were destroyed, although many of them were on fire at various times. [Footnote continues.]

⁸The second fire apparently started from the smoldering ashes of the previous one. It was extinguished with minor damage to the store of William B. Howell on Commerce Street.

⁹Natchez Insurance Company Fire Policy No. 398, September 9, 1839, certified that Johnson paid the premium on "a three story brick house situated on the North side of Main Street between Wall and Pearl Streets, Natchez, occupied by D. F. Waymouth." Johnson Papers.

town.¹⁰ I Gave McCary to day 200 Dollars to get small Bills for it was Rail Road money — There were *three Deaths* in the City to Day

...

September 19, 1839 No buisness a Doing of Any Account — All sorts of a run on the Rail Road Bank both to day and Yesterday for specie.¹¹ The People are Leaving town very fast to Day for fear of Yellow Fever *No Deaths* in the City to Day — Yesterday Dr Lyle was appointed Health officer, in the absence of Dr Hubbard, by the Selectmen¹²

specie: metal, usually gold or silver, that backs up the value of paper money.

...

September 21, 1839 Buisness tolerable for the season — I Bot a Gun or a Rifle from Mrs Vaugn and Gave her seventeen Dollars for it. I went Out and shot her several times and made better shooting at the Commencement than I did afterwards — The fact is I Cannot shoot a Riffle worth a cent

A "run on the bank" would occur during unstable economic periods when banks might fail.

September 22, 1839 Buisness not very Good. People all Leaving the City very fast to Day. Mr *Coddingten Died* this Morning.

September 23, 1839 Citizens are fast Leaving the City — I too made up my mind to Leave the City too. I sent Out a Load of small things

September 24, 1839 Buisness was quite lively for the times — Mrs Vaugn Left the City to day and I bot a Sadle and Bridle and Marting Gale [martingale] from her for five Dollars — I moove out to the Quigless Place to day — Henry Austing Drove the Hack with my Family and I came out on Horse back

martingale: part of a horse bridle used to keep a horse from throwing back its head

September 25, 1839 I am in the Country Sound as a Dollar It was near 9 Oclock to night that I saw from the Country a Large fire Given Light from Natchez and I mounted my horse and in a few minutes was in town and found, I am Sorry to say, One of the Larges Kinds of Fires on the Hill in State Street¹³ It was Yesterday Evening that I took the First Gun to Hunt on the Qui[g]less Place and in a few minuets I found and Killed two Bacbons — in fine Order they were in

bacbon: unidentified

...

November 18, 1839 I Commenced this morning to moove in from the Country to the House on Wall St owned by Mrs Richards I moved all my things in to day safe and without any Loss or accidents

November 19, 1839 I arose this morning Early and went to my Shop for the purpose of rema[in]ing all Day at Buisness and it is the first whole day that I have made in the Shop Since I went out of town for the Sickness — I found Buisness tolerable fair for the Season

...

1840

January 4, 1840 Buisness has been very Good — I Loaned Mr Geo. Watson twenty Dollars With Eighty that He got yesterday He now owes me One Hundred Dollars, which money He is, according to promise, to remit to me as soon as he gets to Grand Gulph — in the Funds of Louisiana — *I hope so, I do indeed* The[r]e is nothing New to day that I have herd of. Gen Jackson is Expected Down in the morning But I dont believe that he will be here at all

¹⁰ It was common practice for Natchez families to move to the country until a yellow-fever epidemic had passed. On December 2, 1839, the Natchez *Courier* stated that "the greater part of the population left the city" during the period from early September until the middle of November.

¹¹ The Natchez press did not comment on the run upon the bank.

¹² The Natchez *Free Trader*, September 20, 1839, carried a short note on the yellow-fever epidemic: "We shall take no responsibility by giving advice (on leaving the city) and shall still be most happy to disappoint those who would seem to be dissatisfied that we do not report 'a smart chance' of deaths every day."

¹³ Late in September, 1839, the building formerly called "The Southern Exchange," owned by Johnson's mother-in-law and managed by him, burned. But unless the fire noted in this entry recorded the event, Johnson did not mention it in his diary. The Natchez *Free Trader*, October 7, 1839, described "the fire a week since, which consumed the square bounded by State, Canal, Washington, and Wall streets" (the block in which the house stood). Johnson was outside the city during the yellow-fever scare of this period — which may be the explanation of his failure to record his loss. In any event, the building, which had cost nearly \$3,000 to construct, was covered by insurance to the extent of \$2,000. On March 7, 1840, the Natchez Insurance Company paid him the full amount of the policy, and before the end of the year he began to rebuild. [Footnote continues.]

January 5, 1840 The Bluff is covered with persons waiting to see Gen Jackson. I took my Horse and wrode Down in the swamp and took a Look at the Land as I went and found it to be pretty swampy — I then went to Mosbys and He had gone in to the Swamp to Hunt I saw 3 of my Hounds

January 6, 1840 I with the rest of the Good Citizens of this City had the pleasure of seeing Genr Jackson on His way to New Orleans, He having stoped at the Landing a short time¹⁴

...

May 7, 1840 To Day was in the aforenoon very pleasant Day untill past One Oclock and then we had rain, with One of the Greatest Tornadoes that Ever was Seen in this place before¹⁵

May 8, 1840 This was a part of the time pleasent and agreable and part of the time was warm and unpleasent Several persons found during this Day that was Killed under the Houses Oh what times, no One Ever seen such times

May 17, 1840 I took my Horse together with Sterns and Jno Jackomine and went into the Swamp — We found the road in a terrible condition Indeed — trees was a Lying all over the Road in Every Direction — Maj Jno Winns Plantation Houses were all Blown over — Gin and all — and the water from the River was very high and runing over for an Hundred yards or more

May 18, 1840 There was a man Sold a negro yesterday at Auction and stole him again Last night, and a negro Girl from Capt Barlow. The name of the Girl was Mary — Mr Sargent got off on some Boat Last night and has gone to Philadelphia where he Lives — Buisness has Been Only tolerable to day in the way of Bathing and in the way [of] shaving too

...

July 4, 1840 Buisness was Quite Dull, this being the 4th of July I did not Keep open more than half of the Day but walked out into the Pasture to see How the Citizens were Engaging themselves and I found them all in fine Humor and in good order

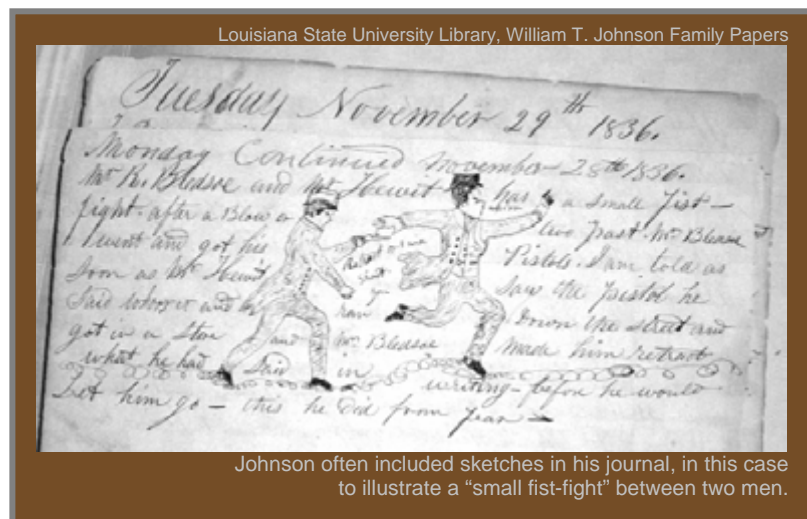
...

July 9, 1840 Buisness has been dull Mr Jno Thom. Winn¹⁶ was shot Last night whilst at supper by some unknown person — A more Gentlemany Young man I have never seen I think, a man that the world must Love if they could but Know Him

July 10, 1840 Buisness as usual has been Quite Dull I have been for the Last ten Days Sinking money.

...

July 24, 1840 Buisness Dull — We have news that Arad Woodard was arrested in some part of Ohio — He is the man that Killed Mr Frazier of Woodville, a Gentleman, who had a Family — I had a



Johnson often included sketches in his journal, in this case to illustrate a "small fist-fight" between two men.

¹⁴ Jackson's brief pause at the Natchez Landing was noted in the Natchez *Free Trader*, January 7, 1840. Three militia organizations — the Natchez Fencibles, the Natchez Guards, and the Adams County Light Guards — had boarded the steamboat *Edward Shippen* at Natchez and ascended the river to a point some eight miles distant where they met the *Vicksburg* and the *Clarksville*, the two boats which carried the Jackson party. Jackson assured the people of Natchez that he would spend a day with them on his return trip. He was en route to New Orleans to visit the scene of his victory over the British in 1815.

¹⁵ For accounts of the tornado, see the extra edition of Natchez *Free Trader*, May 8, 1840. Three days later the *Free Trader* estimated damage to buildings at \$1,260,000 and total damages at \$5,000,000. It was estimated that more than 300 people were killed or drowned in the river and more than 100 wounded. [Footnote continues.]

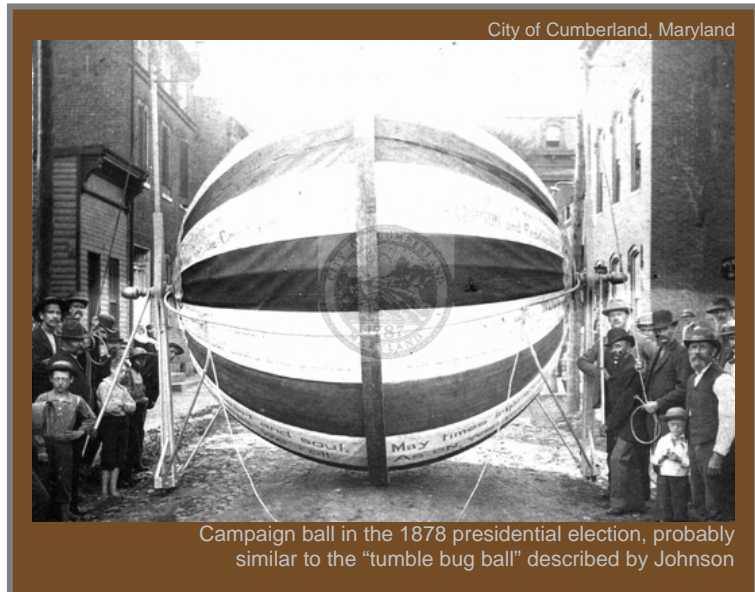
¹⁶ Winn was lieutenant colonel of the Fourth Regiment, Mississippi Militia. The regiment held a commemorative meeting on July 11. [Footnote continues.]

settlement with Sterns¹⁷ to night and told him that I could not afford to Keep him any Longer and that his maner of doing buisness would never do. To be Drunk ½ of his time would never Suit me nor my Customers and I paid him twenty Dollars in good money and then He said that he would work for his vituals, that he did not care for the wages. I told him if He was Disposed to Come around in that way He Could do so, but at present I could do with out any assistance and if Buisness got Better in the fall why I might give Him a Situation, tho I was not sure

...
August 5, 1840 Little or nothing doing at present and there don't appear to me that buisness will Ev[e]r revive Oh what miserabl times. Good Hevens

...
August 10, 1840 Steven got Drunk to day and walked of[f] and I, after he had been Brot Home, Hand Cuffed him and Floged Him. In the first place I Knocked him Down at the Building — he then ran away, but was soon Brought Back again and when he came back he was so drunk that he Could not walk, talk or do any [thing] Else — I gave Him Late in the afternoon a tolerable severe whipping and Left him, so the First thing I know the Rascal had ranaway¹⁸

...
November 2, 1840 Buisness has [been], oh remarkable Dull and there is such a Large Concourse of Persons in the City too — To day is one that I thought we would have a fine Days work but the Contrary is the fact and no mistake sure To Day is the First Day of the Presidential Election and I saw at One time 163 Persons Come in at One time in the Court House yard to vote and the[y] all were at that time Followers of the Tumble Bug Ball, properly named I thing. The Ball was Rolled up and Down the Different streets, and then under the Hill, and up and there was nothing wise about the Concern that I Could See,¹⁹ 649 were the number of votes Polled. The Ball Starts again from the Court House and then Down Town to the Log Cabin, there it was adressed by Col Bingaman for a very short time.



Campaign ball in the 1878 presidential election, probably similar to the "tumble bug ball" described by Johnson

November 3, 1840 The Election is still going on The Greate Hum Bug Ball was stollen Last night by Some One that has more sense than the man that made it, and Demolished the thing, an rolled it Down the Bluff²⁰

...
November 15, 1840 Nothing new transpired during the whole day of any Interest Both of the

¹⁷ Washington Sterns (also spelled Sterne and Stearns), free Negro barber, worked intermittently for William Johnson and Robert McCary between 1831 and 1840. In this last year Johnson paid him \$25 per month and fed him. Sterns was the oldest and most independent of all Johnson's barbershop employees; he had written to Johnson in terms of equality as early as 1829 and he had inherited property. He had been freed in 1827 by an executor of the will of Payton Sterne of Natchez, who had left his property to "three coloured children in my possession, Sons and Daughters of a certain woman of color named Milly." The will (probated 1819) had further enjoined the executors to arrange for the children's freedom and for their education. In 1841 the Adams County Board of Police refused to grant Washington a license to remain in the state, but his name appeared on the tax rolls two years later. As a result of a number of emancipations of members of the family arranged by Washington Sterns and his mother, the Natchez free Negro group bearing their name increased considerably in size in the 1830's and 1840's. [Footnote continues.]

¹⁸ There was considerable agitation by the citizens of Natchez at this time against the selling of intoxicants to Negroes. See letter in *Natchez Courier*, August 13, 1840.

¹⁹ One of the effective Whig methods of arousing party enthusiasm was the rolling of a gigantic ball from town to town. Trooping crowds followed singing, "Hail to the ball which in grandeur advances." One of the campaign slogans was "Harrison and two dollars a day and roast beef."

²⁰ The Natchez *Free Trader*, November 3, 1840, reported: "The election yesterday went off in the most peaceable and orderly manner; no fights and an abundance of good feeling."

Political Partees are Claiming the State of Pennsylvania. We dont Know which — I wrode out in the Afternoon with Mc He wrode the Poney and I wrode Kity Fisher, and the way She paced Coming Back was Familiar to me

...

November 17, 1840 I was doing Some fencing and stopd work Nothing of Importance, Nothing true from Pennsylvania I Am In hopes that the Democrats will carry the State

...

November 30, 1840 Buisness has [been] very Good for a Monday. Mr Robertson paid me the Amount of His acct which was Twenty Eight Dollars to the 12th of June, 1840 — Came to hand in Good time. I wanted the money very much at present — I find out to day that my New Brick Building is about to fall down — I hope not — must have been Ocasioned by the Tornado

...

December 5, 1840 Nothing New that I have heread. A Day of Singular Coincidences The following Are a few of the them. In the first place, my 2 Turkeys were Stollen & my 2 Cows were Left Out and Ranaway I had 1 Calf to Die — Steven Ranaway — All of those I was pestered with I intended to have gone a Hunting but for the fact of all those things Runing away &c I was prevented and all for the Better I hope Yes, and I had my mare Kitty Fisher Badly Hurt by John in Looking for my Cows — I signed an article of agreement this morning with Mr Staples, Renting him my House for One thousand Dollars per year Commencing on 15th inst

December 6, 1840 I find Buisness not so good this is a nother mistake for Buisness is not at all to be complained of for it is some what Lively Considerbley so

...

1841

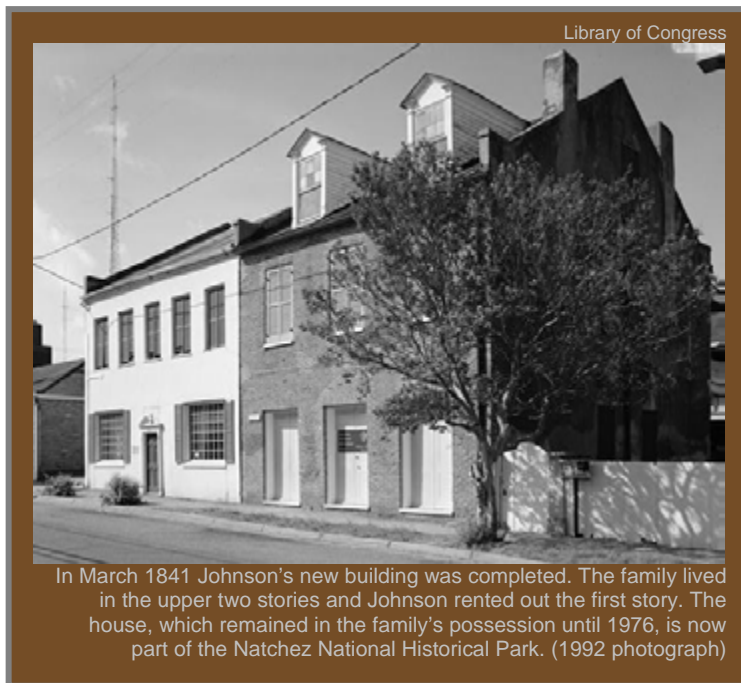
March 2, 1841 Buisness only Tolerable Steven got drunk this morning and ranaway — Bill found Him out in the Body of a Cart under the Brick shed and Brought Him Home

...

March 11, 1841 Buisness in the shop uncommonly dull, I have been Quite buisy all Day — Mr Brown the Plasterer finished the Kitchen this Afternoon, and Layed One Hearth in Kitchen. Paper Hanger Commenced this morning to Hang the paper in front Room Came very near finishing the Room to day — I Commenced to work on the wooden Cistern to day, stoping up the cracks with tar &c I Commenced to day to moove down some of the Furniture to the Building &c. Mr Phillips Left to day for the uper States Somewhere

...

March 25, 1841 To Day about [blank] Oclock my Little Daugter was Born And the Larges & Finest Child I Ever saw of its Age — Mrs Dickson was with Her, Ann was well at Dinner time²¹ I Sent in a Letter to day One Hundred Dollars to Mr Miller in Orleans. I gave the Letter to Mr Britton On Board



²¹ This was Anna L. Johnson (christened Ann Johnson, and known as Anna L. Johnston in her later years), the diarist's eldest daughter and fourth child. She died November 25, 1922. . . . In the above entry, "Ann" referred to the mother.

Steam Boat Sultana, Mr Howard paid me to day \$10 the Amount of His acct. in full to date — Mr Jery Thomas paid \$3 on His acct.

...

March 28, 1841 I remained at Home all day and read a Book through

...

April 2, 1841 To Day the young man Phelps Came and wanted me to pay Him for catching Steven I Gave Eight Pieces of Paper for it, Such as I sell for 5 Bits a Roll, which is Just five Dollars that the Infernal Rascal has Cost me precisely — not to Include His days work.

...

April 22, 1841 Nothing new that I Know. To Day it was that I opened my Baths for the 1st time this season. Nothing new — 7 Persons took Baths to day That is doing very good indeed for a Commencement

...

May 3, 1841 To Day is Quite a Dull Day Nothing new that I Have Herd — I Took a Boy by the name of Edmond from Mr N. Hoggatt to day to Lern the trade of Haircutting & shaving &c — Mr George Snider Died Last night or Just before day Light this morning

May 4, 1841 Nothing New that I Know of To Day I went up to McCarys Shop and told Him that I had two Little Boys and was requested by Mr Hogatt to get situations for them to Learn a trade of some Kind — He wanted One of them and I Gave Him Choice of the two, Jefferson and William He Liked the Look of Wm Best tho Wm told Him that He wanted to Live with me so Mc then said He would take the other — Accordingly I sent Jeff up to Him this Evening

*Jefferson
and
William:
slaves of
Nathaniel
Hoggatt,
Jr., sent
to become
apprentice
barbers*

...

May 12, 1841 This morning Shortly After Breakfast time The Boy William ran off and Took with Him Jeff, His Brother, that I had put with McCary They Both went Out Home. They are Boy that were put with me by Mr N Hogatt William was the Cause in Toto — From what I have seen of Him I am Inclined to think that He is a Boy of no Kind of Energy — Young William Commenced this Afternoon to Moove the Effects that He had in a Room Back in my yard that He was to have paid me Eight Dollars per month for — McCary got on His Horse To Day After those Boys Ranaway And tried to overtake them, but did not Cuceed

*Effects:
posses-
sions*

...

May 14, 1841 I am Nervous to Day And will have some fighting to do before night I do Expect, Tho I hope not, Cincerely do I, and I will try and Keep Cool — Very Singular that Steven ranaway to day And the two Boys that ranaway the other day should have returned at the same time Just as One ranaway two Came back or one rrather, for One of Said Boys ranaway from Mc, the other from me, I wrode Out this afternoon to the Forks of the Road to try and swop Stephen off for Some One Else, But could find no one that I would Like

...

June 19, 1841 Nothing new that I know of Buisness To Day was Good, Bathing and Shaving also

June 21, 1841 Nothing new this morning that is worth the attention of a smart man

...

July 24, 1841 Nothing new that I Know of — Large Comp of Our Citizens went out to day in the Bayous in search of Runaway Negroes. Capt. Ruffner & Mr McAlister, Mr Joseph Mesho and a number of Our Respectable Citizens was out — Mr R finds a fire Burning in the woods — Jo Mesho finds a Bucket of meat in a tree where the Runaways has been tho there was no Negroes Caught that has been Known — I had a Settlement to day with Mr Reynolds and I find to my surprise that instead of owing him about \$20, when the Documents was Compaired he was in my

*Comp., i.e.,
Component*

debt 16 cents Close fit it was²² To day has been the Beef Shooting at the Race tract and target shooting &c. Mc was Out and won \$10 from the people

...

November 27, 1841 To day Has been a Day of Greate Trouble with me on acct of the Seviere illness of my Little Richard — He is very Sick and has had several Fitts or Spasems which So alarms me, I remained all the Evening at Home, Did not go to the Shop . . .

...

November 30, 1841 To day I find Richard no better, Still Suffering As much as a poor Little Soul Can

...

December 6, 1841 My Poor Little Richard is very sick yet. Dr Davis Comes very Regular to see him — The Poor child has had a very hard time of it. Poor Little Fellow. God Grant that He may soon recover from this Dreadfull sickness — McCary and Hester Commings has Came to night to set up with Him

...

December 16, 1841 . . . My Little Richard is much better to day Thank God.

...

1842

January 7, 1842 The Streets are muddy and unpleasant walking in them, Nothing new that I Know of Buisness dull. I took in Cash to day 6.37½ And Collected \$29.50 Those times are very different from what they were 6 or seven years ago — The City is full of French and Duch Jews — trading mostly in Dry Goods, I got a Letter from Mrs Miller to day in which She mentions that George Britton, very Lately on a visit to New Orleans from Bayou Sarah, So Stoping at Mrs Williams Gratis Got up Early in the morning and Stole a wach from Mrs. Williams and Left the City, That is too bad for the Lady is quite Poor indeed

Dry Goods:
textile
products,
fabrics,
and related
merchandise
for sale

Gratis:
at no charge

...

April 20, 1842 Nothing new that I Know of. Business Dull, Quite so indeed Mr T Rose Came in the shop to night and we began and ta[l[k]ed untill After ten Oclock — The Subjects, Banks & Banking — prospects of war — money Loaning — insolvent people, England and the English — Slavy — Texas & Mexico

...

April 24, 1842 Nothing new has transpired to day worth the attention &c. Mc and myself took a wride Out this Evening to the Scott old Fields and the Creek &c — There we read the Laws of Louisiana in pamphlet form &c.

...

April 28, 1842 Nothing new Buisness has been Dull, very Dull — We Lost a Beautifull Little Cannary to day, One that we Raised — prety One It got Out — Mrs. Linton, Daughter &c. Left this Evening for the North on the Grey Eagle S B

S B:
Steamboat

...

June 6, 1842 Nothing new that I Know of Except that some people on the other side of the River Caught One of those Runaway Slaves that helped Kill a man by the name Todd Living near Red River — They Burned Him up soon after he was taken They Caught One moore of them and they Brought him to there Concordia Jail &c. They shot the other one but did [not] Kill Him

...

²² The account totaled \$251.81.



"A Mississippi River landing," postcard, late 19th century

July 9, 1842 I Spoke to A. L. Willson the other day to procure me a passage on the Steam Boat, Maid of Arkensaw, which he promised to do and to day when the Boat Came I went down to see about it and I saw him and He told me that he had spoke to the Capt. and that he had Refused to Let a State Room, But that my wife Could have the whole of

Col, i.e., Colored

Johnson's wife traveled to New Orleans with their three youngest children to visit family, returning July 28.

It is possible that Johnson bribed the captain to allow his wife a state room on the steamboat.

the Ladies Cabbin to Herself but it was a Rule on his Boat not to Let any Col persons have State Rooms on Her — I asked him to go with me on Bourd — He went on Board and showd me the Capt. and I asked him if could not spare a State Room and he told me that He Could not spare one that it was against the Rules of His Boat and that he had said it once and that was Enough and that he was a man of his word and Spoke of Prejudice of the Southern people, it was damd Foolish &c., and that he was a doing a Buisness for other people and was Compelld to adopt those Rules — I did not prevail by no means — He then said that I Could Have a State Room on Conditions which I told him would answer.

...

July 27, 1842 I Saw Mr W Burns this Evening and had a Long talk with him about Winston. He wantd to Know how he was ageting along &c and I told him that he was doing very well tho I was not at this time Learning him much in the way of his Book. He wanted me to do so and he thought that Winston was now about Eighteen years old and that he wanted to have him Learn to Read and write, so that he might be able to Keep his Books or accts when he became older Enough to do Buisness for Himself He thought that wages was and Injury to a Boy, that would give them Bad Habits, and that he did not want him to have any but to work along as Long as he was satisfied. We Could agree I thanked him. He Said that he thought that there would be something Left out of the Estate and that if he conducted himself well that he would give him a start some day — I told him that Winston was a very smart Boy and that I Liked him very much indeed²³

...

August 13, 1842 Nothing new that I Know of Buisness still without any Change for the better, [I] wrote a Letter to New Orleans to day and sent it down on the Steamer Maid of Arkensaw — I had Last night and this morning together several Quarrels with my wife She Commenced it of course I did not have a great deal to say — all amounts to nothing any how for I Cant say that I said anything to Her to Hurt her feelings that I believd myself whilst I was talking. I only did it in a Spirrit of Retalation — that [is] all so Help me — All sorts of fights at the City Hotell to night, Mr Geo Pulling and Thom Munce. Mr Munce got whiped and there [were] several other fights that I don't hear anything said about this Morning

...

²³ It was customary to end the apprenticeship of free Negroes when they became eighteen, but William Winston (Negro barber who worked for Johnson) was not yet free. The will of Fountain Winston had directed that "Bill or William" should be freed when he was twenty-one years of age, had made provision for his support during his minority [years under eighteen], and had left all property in the estate (amounting to more than \$3000 after certain deductions) to the executor to hold in trust for the young Negro. [Footnote continues with sources.]

1843

January 20, 1843 Buisness was dull for the season. Nothing new that I Know of. I offered Mr Gemmerson to day five Hundred and fifty dollars for 60 Acres of his Land that Fronts on the River, I bot a vest to day and One Dozen pairs of Shoes for the Children

January 21, 1843 Buisness has been dull, Quite so, I think I have had several Conversations with Mr Gimmerson to day about his Land tho we made no trade after all, I think that it will be bot by Mr Weldon & Co

...

January 27, 1843 Steven was in Jail this morning And I went and took him Out and Floged Him not a Little, He was taken up by a Duchman who had him before Esqr. Rivers and tryed to make it appear that he had Stollen some things from Dr Ogdens but Steven got up and Cleared his own self before the Jury in a minute

...

January 30, 1843 Tax, Tax, Taxes, Taxes, Taxes, Tax I gave in my Tax List as Follows—

One Town Lot & 2 Houses, Value	5000
Five Slaves, value	1500
	—————
Mrs Amy Johnson Property —	
Five Slaves, Value	800
	—————
Mrs Harriett Battles Property	
One House & 1 Lot, Value	1900
2 Slave, Value	300
	—————

...

February 21, 1843 Nothing new that I Know of Buisness Some what dull I bot a Little Boy by the name of Anderson from Mr Thornton who signed his name as Agent for a mr Covington, When Ever Mr Covington Calls and will make me title He will Get his money, which is Two Hundred and ninety dollars

...

March 23, 1843 This has been a very Cold and unpleasant day Tis very Cold indeed, No One here has Ever Seen Such wether in March here Greate many Plover in the fields in Every direction from the City tho they are very poor

March 24, 1843 Nothing new more than the Effects of mr F Stantonin Bank Ruptsy was Sold to day and a Short time after Dinner we had the Snow to Commence faling and in the course of three Hours the town was perfecty white Then the Citisens Commenced to throw Snow Balls

March 25, 1843 To day the Sun shone out very fine but did not melt all the Snow that fell yesterday Prety good Snow balling to be had to day in the Shade, Nothing new. Buisness tolerable Only — Comet was visible to night.

...

April 5, 1843 Nothing new. Buisness tolerable good Another Spanish Barber has opened a Shop around by Mr Kanes in State Street — Mr Antonio paid me to day twenty Dollars and owes me Still thirty Dollars



April 6, 1843 News — that Gen Santa Ana had made a proposition to Texas to acknowledge her Independence upon Certain Conditions &c.²⁴ Another report Says that President Boyer had fled from Port au Prince²⁵ — Cap Navet told me good news today — I am thus far pleased.

...

July 19, 1843 Nothing new — Buisness dull. I Jumped on board of the Steam Boat Buck Eye this morning and Started to New Orleans. We got off[f] at Eight Oclock in the morning — we made a good run for the times

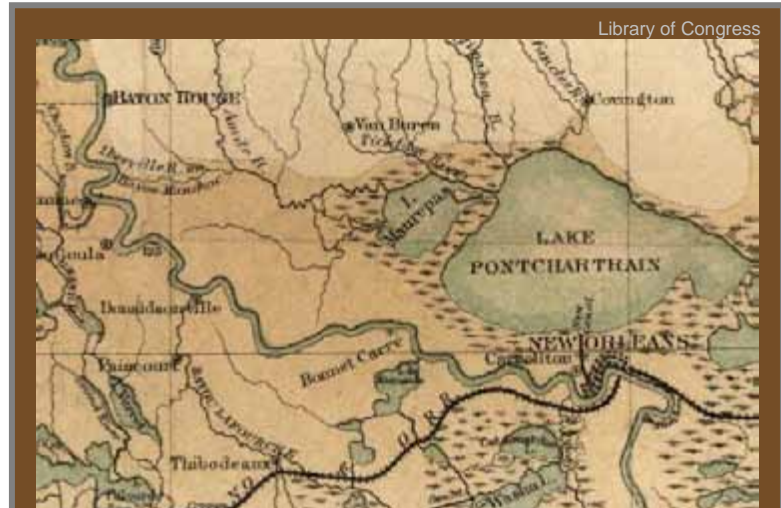
July 20, 1843 Mississippi River — I arrivd at Lafayette this morning about ½ past 7 Oclock. I then got in the Omnibus and wrode down to the City and was there two Hours before the Boat got in. From what I can hear the whole population of New Orleans has been more or Less affected with the Enflurenzy. Mrs Miller is Sick with it and Mr Miller has Just recoverd from the Complaint

July 21, 1843 I arose this morning Early and took a walk to the market in Coppany with Mr Miller then back to Breakfast and then to the office &c. We then got in a Cab about 11 Oclock and wrode down to the Ponchetrain Rail Road We got in the Car and went down to the Lake. We then went down to the Bath House and took a Bath in the lake. I

remained for Some time in the Lake tho Mr M. came Out amediately We then wrode back to the City in the Cars, took dinner, and I Bot a few things before dinner and among the rest was a Scein to fish with After I went back to the House I found that Mr Miller was Sick from going to Bathe in the Lake and I came off[f] and Left Him coverd up in the bed — I did not get off from the City untill I suppose 7 Oclock. We made rrather a Slow run for the Boat was heavy Ladend

July 22, 1843 We were on the River and got up at Baton Rouge about ½ past 12 Oclock The Boat put Out Considerable freight, Cement, Bricks, Slate. I took a walk nearly all over the town of Baton Rogue, then bot 2 Razor strap and a Book of Songs — About 2 Oclok we got fast in backing Out and remaind untill late at night, 10 or 11 Oclock We were taken Out of the Difficulty by the Steam Boat Mount Vernon

July 23, 1843 I was On the River all day to day. We stoped at Bauyou Sarah to day and did not get up to natchez untill late in the night, Say about 2 Oclock



Mahon, *Map of the Alluvial Region of the Mississippi*, 1861, detail with Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lake Pontchartrain, and the Mississippi River



View of New Orleans, in *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters*, 1856 (detail)

²⁴ The conditions included a provision that Texas was to acknowledge the sovereignty of Mexico. Although there was not the slightest chance that Texas would agree to this provision, President Sam Houston used the offer to secure an armistice between the Republic of Texas and Mexico. [Footnote continues.]

²⁵ Jean Pierre Boyer, president of the Republic of Haiti after the gaining of its independence, fled the country during the insurrection of 1843.

July 24, 1843 I arrivd about 2 Oclck Last night and came up the Hill. I found all well and nothing new. Buisness dull

...

August 1, 1843 Nothing new what Ever — Mr Day gets the Contract for Building the Jail and Commenced this morning Early to pull down the old One, I believe he gets 11,000 Dollars for the building of it &c. Mr George Pulling was Burried this Evening ½ past 3 Oclock. He was a good man &c. I Only took in 9 dimes to day Every day I make Less — oh what times &c.

...

August 23, 1843 Nothing new. Steven ranaway Monday and has not Come Home yet. I herd of him several times to day. I have been a good part of this day Ingaged in cuting or puting up my Corn, Buisness is very dull indeed

August 24, 1843 Nothing new. Buisness dull, I Came very near Cetching Steven to night. He was in the Stable ajoin[in]g mine but he Jumped out and ran into the weeds somewhere

...

September 15, 1843 Nothing new Go[o]ld deal of talk about the Ellection for Sherriff. Mr Boyers Friends are very Sanguine about it — \$25 VS 2 Cows I bet with Mr Jaquimine to day Gave him Eights votes and took Mr Newman VS. Mr Boyer. They are both men that I Like very well. I have no Choice at all

...

October 21, 1843 To day has been warm again Such wether will, I am told, produce new cases of yellow fever in New Orleans. The yellow fever [is] a terable mallady: but if it is Gods will, why not? Slay Slay them. Buisness is tolerable Only — Nothing new — I herd Speech to night from Mr S. S. Prentess which was one of the best I have ever herd It was on repudiation Oh he was very Seviere indeed, He spoke from ½ past 7 untill ½ past 10 Oclock to a full House

...

November 1, 1843 To day is the 1st day of the Fair and there was a great many persons Out thare — I Looked at the Cattle and the Hogs & Horses They were very fine indeed I took my Little William with me on the Little White poney that I Bot yesterday and I wrode the Combey Horse

...

December 5, 1843 Buisness has been good To day and I have been prety Extravigant for I have bought 3 pair pants and 1 Coat & a bale of Hay and a Barrell of Irish Potatoes, and Several other things The City is prety well fill with Strangers and a greate many has Left for New Orleans. Mr Fisks man Brot my Cow Home this Evening and I gave him two Dollars for it

...

December 30, 1843 Nothing new. Buisness Tolerable fair. I Expect from what past between Mr Cannon and myself that he will take Steven On Monday if Nothing Happens — And what is the Cause of my parting with him, why it is nothing but Liquor, Liquor, His fondness for it. Nothing more, poor Fellow. There are many worse fellows than poor Steven is, God Bless Him. Tis his Own fault. This day was Committed before Esqr Woods, Monroe Beck and a young Fellow by the name of Mitchell They were bound over to Court at the May Term. They are both bad young men, Sure.

December 31, 1843 To day has been to me a very Sad Day; many tears was in my Eyes to day On acct. of my Selling poor Steven. I went under the hill this Evening to See him of[f] but the Boat did not Cross over again and Steven got drunk in a few minutes and I took him Home & made him Sleep in the garret and Kept him Safe

1844

January 1, 1844 I rested bad Last night. I had much Care On my mind, the night appeared very Long — I got up this morning Early and took Steven with me down to the Ferry Boat and gave him up to the Overseer of Young & Cannon. Crawford was his name I gave Steven a pair [of] Suspenders and a pr

of Socks and 2 Cigars, Shook hands with him and see [him] go On Bourd for the Last time I felt hurt but Liquor is the Cause of his troubles; I would not have parted with Him if he had Only have Let Liquor alone but he Cannot do it I believe, I received a check from mr Cannon to day On Mr Britton & Co for four Hundred dollars and a demand note or due bill for two Hundred more, I will Speak more of it when I See it again for I did not Examin it very Close this morning — To day Came On the Election and there were a great number of fights during the day with One or another &c.



William Tiler Johnson wrote his last journal entry over seven years later, on June 14, 1851. Two days later he was ambushed and murdered by Baylor Winn, also a free black man, with whom he had long disputed over the boundary of their lands outside near Natchez. Before Johnson died the next morning, he identified Winn as his murderer. In addition, two free black men (including one of his sons) and an enslaved man witnessed the murder. Winn successfully escaped prosecution by presenting evidence that he was white; thus by Mississippi law no black person could testify against him in court. After two years of trying to refute Winn's claim, the state dropped the case and Winn was released.

An indication of Johnson's standing in the community is the article published by the Natchez *Courier* two days after his death.*

SHOCKING MURDER

Our city was very much excited on Tuesday morning, by hearing that what could only be deemed a horrible and deliberate murder had been committed upon an excellent and most inoffensive man. It was ascertained that William Johnson, a free man of color, born and raised in Natchez, and holding a respected position on account of his character, intelligence and deportment, had been shot, . . .

This murder has created a great deal of excitement, as well from its atrocity, as from the peaceable character of Johnson and his excellent standing. His funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Mr. Watkins, who paid a just tribute to his memory, holding up his example as one well worthy of imitation by all of his class. We observed very many of our most respected citizens at his funeral. Johnson left a wife, nine children, and quite a handsome property; probably twenty to thirty thousand dollars.



*William Ransom Hogan & Edwin Adams Davis, eds., *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1993), 58-59 (Hogan & Davis introduction).