

The History of the Johnson Building

Recorded by
Nancy Tredway



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The property on which the Johnson Building was built changed hands seven times in 1880 with the price fluctuating from \$150 to \$20, back up to \$50, \$100, \$150 and \$275. Then in 1881 the building was built on the property and Mary Thomas bought it for \$250. She immediately sold it for \$800. Walker Burnett bought the building and the property in 1901, and when Effie Jane Lashbrook arrived in Gunnison with her sick husband and children in 1901 she took over the empty building. She turned the lower floor into a restaurant and made living quarters for her family upstairs, and named the restaurant the Royal Cafe. Burnett leased the building to Sam and Anna Francis (Frankie) Johnson for their restaurant in 1904 and at that time it became the Johnson Restaurant. Johnsons bought the building on October 20, 1920.

SAMUEL SYLVESTER JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson was born in McGregor, Iowa on February 9, 1866. For a time he lived with relatives and worked for pennies behind a plow. When he accumulated a little money he contacted a wagon-train master who was going West and traveled with him although he had to walk because there wasn't enough room to ride on the stage. When he reached the valley near Mt. Princeton, he was too short of money to take a stage, so he made his way up Monarch Pass on foot. During this walk he became aware of a heart condition which had bothered him since childhood., so he took a stage and eventually arrived in Tin Cup, Colorado. He got a job as a cook at the Marble Quarry. He also did work to clear land of willows and



Samuel Johnson

sagebrush to prepare for pastures but decided that such outdoor work was not for him. He decided that he really liked food preparation and at that point he found employment as a chef the busy Lake City Hotel.

ANNA FRANCES VOIGT

Anna Frances Voigt was born on January 18, 1876 in Hamburg, Germany. She was the daughter of Ernest and Minnie Voigt, a German Jewess, and when she was seven years old the family emigrated to the United States coming through Ellis Island to Fremont, Nebraska. Anna lived there with her family and worked as a Harvey Girl until the late 1890's when she came to Lake City, Colorado. Her doctor had advised her to come to Colorado because of her health problems which were aggravated by the coal fumes and the inclement weather in Nebraska. Her doctor had a friend in Lake City, Colorado which at that time had a population of 10,000. She took a job as a waitress in the Lake City Hotel and there she met Samuel Sylvester Johnson who was the chef. The story is told that when Sam first saw Anna he asked someone who she was and said, "I'm going to marry that girl because I like the way she wears her hair".

Frankie and Samuel were married on January 3, 1900 in Lake City and they took over the management of the boarding house at the Ute-Ulay Mine. When the mining operations slowed down in Lake City, the Johnsons came to Gunnison and operated a restaurant on West New York Ave. They moved to Main Street in 1904 and opened the Johnson Restaurant. From the very beginning the Johnsons ran a restaurant to satisfy hungry people, those who could pay and those who could not.



Anne Frances "Frankie" Johnson

THE JOHNSON RESTAURANT

When Frankie and Sam moved to Main Street it was lined with wide ditches and there were huge horse troughs in the streets. Of course, there was no indoor plumbing and the waste water from the restaurant was carried out the front door and dumped into the ditches. The toilet was in the alley behind the restaurant. Water was brought in by barrels carried by mules. Sam's horses were kept in a stable behind the restaurant where the Community Church now stands. There was a bar on the corner which eventually burned down even though it stood next door to the firehouse. Originally there was a cobbler's shop next to the restaurant on the south side. The Palisade and the Weinberger Hotels were located on Main Street as were the Quinn and Hogan Saloons and the house on South Main which is now owned by Charles and Sherryl Peterson. The customers in the restaurant were miners, businessmen and ranchers from the valley.

There were a number of Sporting Houses in Gunnison ; several by the LaVeta Hotel and some on Main Street. Sarah Trine told of the stories she had heard about Negro Mary, Irish Ann and Flossie who committed suicide after discovering that she had a venereal disease. After a proper burial by Sarah's parents , Flossie was buried in the cemetery next to Sarah's baby sister.

Samuel was a wonderful cook and no one was ever turned away from the restaurant. The story is told that one night a man came in and asked Samuel if he could feed 30 people that night. Sam said he couldn't feed them all the same thing, but that, yes, he could feed them. About an hour later in came 31 convicts chained together at the legs with two armed guards one of whom stood at the front door and one at the back. The convicts were working on the Million Dollar Highway. No one said a word, the story goes, and Samuel

and Frankie carried out big bowls of food and put them on the table for the men to eat. It was an evening that the Johnsons would always remember.

A meal in those early days in the restaurant cost 35c and a mug of beer cost 10c. At one point the restaurant down the street dropped their meal price to 25c. Sam told his wife that he was going to drop his prices to 15c . His wife told him that they certainly couldn't make any money with that price and they would lose the restaurant . To which Sam replied that they would lose the restaurant if they didn't meet the competition. Two weeks later their competitor left town without paying his bills and Sam upped the meal price to 35c once more.

Many of the men who were regular customers in the restaurant had their own mug for coffee and they sat around a big estate oak table in the middle of the dining room that was surrounded by "assorted" chairs . There were some antiques, but it was much later when Sarah remodeled the restaurant that most of the antiques were added. Although the pastry table had come with Johnsons from Lake City and their grand piano had been carried over Slumgullion Pass in a wagon pulled by a team of horses and was a prized addition in the restaurant. Until 1996 the middle room of the building was decorated by wagon wheel light fixtures hanging from the ceiling. Apparently a judge had been trying a criminal case in Lake City at the court house. The criminal escaped out of one of the windows. As he ran, he was pursued by men in an old carriage. The criminal entered the cemetery which, at that time, was full of ornate gravestones and as the carriage entered the cemetery, the wheel caught on a stone and the carriage crashed. Sarah's parents purchased those wheels and made them into light fixtures which for years hung in the middle room of the restaurant.

Three children were born to Frankie and Samuel in the apartment upstairs over the Johnson Restaurant. Georgia was born in 1905, Frank in 1907 and Sarah in 1909. Georgia died in infancy and the story goes that when Georgia was but an infant she was in her carriage in the dining room of the restaurant when a salesman with "quality goods" came to see her mother. He sold Frankie a green mosquito netting to put over the baby carriage. It cost 10c a yard, and it was draped over the top of the carriage. As Georgia sucked on her bottle some of the netting also got into her mouth and her mouth was filled with the green dye. They rushed her to the Dr. but the baby became violently sick and died. She is buried next to Sarah's parents in the Gunnison Cemetery.

Frank and Sarah grew up in the Johnson Building. Sarah remembers that she learned to skate in the restaurant as she would set the tables for the evening meal. She remembers her treasures as a child were her teddy bear, her doll and a set of children's books. Sarah began waiting on customers when she was 7 years old.

When Sarah's parents first rented the Main Street Building the owner, Mr. Wright, told Frankie that if she would keep the garbage for food for the pigs that he raised really clean he would pay her 25c a week. Frankie didn't tell her husband but saved the quarters in a green tea can in the kitchen. When the opportunity came for them to buy the building, Sam was amazed to find out that his wife had saved \$62.25, which when combined with their other savings was enough to buy the property. Sam not only worked hard in the restaurant, but he raised and raced horses, and wrote poetry:

THE MEADOW AND THE DELL,
BEDECK THE WORLD WITH BEAUTY
ENTHRALLS A TRANQUIL SPELL
THUS WORK LOVE AND BEAUTY
IN LIFES SPRING TIME OF MAY
SETS THE WORLD TO MUSIC
AND ADVANCES WITH THE DAY

Samuel was a very large man and Sarah recalls that he often wore a heavy belt around his waist because of the hernias from which he suffered. When he died in March of 1923 Sarah remembers vividly how a door was taken from one of the upstairs rooms and how her father was laid out on that door. She tells of him being carried down the stairs while her mother stood in the street watching and crying. He was carried into the restaurant where he was embalmed and prepared for burial. Sarah remembers how the carriage that carried him to the cemetery went down the Main Street of Gunnison and that every business pulled down their shades in honor of him as the hearse went by. He was buried in the Gunnison Cemetery.

After Samuel's death Frankie took over running the restaurant with the help of Sarah and Frank. They all worked hard, but Frankie was a wonderful cook and the restaurant continued to be successful. Sarah married a fellow student and a friend of her brother, Harry Trine. They were married by a Catholic priest at the fair in Hotchkiss in 1930. Trines had two daughters, Shirley and Sally.

Sarah tells of the first Christmas tree she and Harry had. Because they were so poor they mixed starch and water and made a paste which they spread on the limbs of a little tree to make it look like flocking. Her mother gave them 25c to buy a package of decorations and she remembers that as the most beautiful tree they ever had.

Sarah and Harry moved to Denver to work during the winters. During the depression the pay was very low and Harry and Sarah worked for a whole day for \$1.47 for the both of them. The Negro Mammy who was the bakery cook in that restaurant saved all the leftover combread for the Trines and they took it home with them at the end of the day for the girls.

When Sarah's mother died in 1942, Sarah and her brother inherited the Johnson Restaurant. Frank asked Sarah and Harry to come back to Gunnison because he wanted them to live in a "decent community". Sarah and Harry did come back and Sarah bought Frank's share of the restaurant. Frank went on to own a number of other businesses in Gunnison during the next years. He and his wife, Elsie, ran the Silver Dollar Restaurant for twenty-five years and he had the reputation as the best baker in Gunnison.

Sarah and Harry and the girls moved into the apartment above the Johnson Restaurant and there began another unique chapter in Gunnison's history. The restaurant continued to be a gathering place for the community and as the tourists began to arrive in Gunnison more and more people were needed to work in the restaurant cleaning and serving customers. During the summer, a number of the friends of Shirley and Sally worked in the restaurant, many of them spending the nights in the apartment above the restaurant. Sometimes there were as many as 14 girls sleeping upstairs and on those nights Sarah and Harry were to be found sleeping under the piano on the first floor.

The workday began at 4:00 a.m. for Harry who would begin cooking the biscuits and sausage. The girls first shift began at 4:30 a.m. They worked hard, serving three meals a day (ham, lamb, ram, and bear) but the stories that are told always include the fact that it was so much fun to work for the Trines. It was like a big family and Sarah was a

loving, caring person and like a mother to everyone. She didn't try to change anyone but accepted each person for who they were. Sarah always seemed to have time to listen while she was working in the kitchen.

One story is told by one of the girls who worked for the Trines. She had gone to a dance the night before and had been out late; she was sitting in one of the booths half asleep when Harry crept in and tied bells to her shoestrings. Then he shouted at her to wake her up and when she jumped out of the booth of course the bells started to jingle. Harry was laughing hysterically but made her wear the bells all day so he could be sure she was keeping busy. He would also peak through the curtains of the alcove to keep an eye on the girls to make sure they were staying out of trouble.

Sarah had a big crowbar in the kitchen that she would use to beat on a pan, and that was a signal for all the girls to drop what they were doing and make a beeline to the kitchen to see what the trouble was.

Another story told is that for a number of years the Trailway Bus would make arrangements to stop with a bus load of people for lunch or dinner at Johnson's. They were a welcome addition to the business. But one day, Harry had been teasing Sarah in the kitchen and had flipped her on the behind with a towel. Sarah retreated to the little bathroom and threw a big towel over her head and hid down in the corner behind the washing machine thinking that he would come in to tease her some more, so she was ready to surprise him. However, the driver from the bus was the one who came in to wash his hands. Sarah, thinking it was Harry, threw a towel over his head and jumped up on him holding him around the neck and almost choking him to death. She had jumped up and wrapped

her legs around his waist before she realized it wasn't Harry. Somehow she managed to slide down off him and he ran out through the restaurant. The next week, Sarah and Harry received a letter from the bus company canceling their agreement to stop at the restaurant because they had been discourteous to customers. Harry kept saying he couldn't understand what had happened because they had all seemed to like the food. Sarah never said a word to Harry about what had happened.

Except for Guy Shakes who lived and worked with Trines for 25 years as a handyman the Trines hired girls to work for them. They didn't want any young men around to distract their help.

The customers of the Johnson Restaurant loved all the antiques that Sarah had collected through the years. Lovely cruet sets were used on each table, on the north wall of the restaurant 100 year old Ridgeway and Delft dishes were displayed. These dishes were brought to Gunnison from Germany by Sarah Trine's grandmother. Also on the north wall of the restaurant was a lovely old walnut buffet that had been used in the LaVeta Hotel at one time. In the middle of the restaurant there was a music alcove with a gilded Chickering concert grand piano. This small room was papered with sheet music which was popular in that day.

Until the late 1950's when the new kitchen was added, all the cooking for the restaurant as well as the heating of the building was done with the huge black iron stove which was eight feet long and had two huge ovens. It sat in the back of the what is the middle room of the building today, and Sarah has many memories of all the miners and ranchers who pulled up their chairs to warm themselves and drink their coffee by the wonderful old stove throughout the years. It is a valued display piece in the building today.

The restaurant was filled with antiques and in later years when it was only opened in the summer, everything was packed up and stored during the winter. It was quite an undertaking and many friends and neighbors were called upon to help with the packing. Then at the beginning of the next summer everything, each plate and dish, must be placed in exactly the right place again. One year the girls decided to take pictures during the summer so they would remember where everything should go when it was unpacked for the next season.

Sarah has a wonderful collection of dolls; big dolls, small dolls, beautiful dolls and dolls that she pulled out of the trash. Someone said Sarah could never stand to see an abandoned baby doll. The dolls were arranged all over the restaurant and certainly added to the nostalgic atmosphere.

Many stories are told of the player piano which stood along the south wall. It was enjoyed by customers and waitresses alike. Sarah had collected numerous rolls of music for the entertainment of her customers.

One year, Sarah had been saving money for quite awhile for a new winter coat which she really needed. One morning she started out to buy a coat but on the way happened by a place where they were having a garage sale. Sarah bought a huge stack of old sheet music with part of her savings and then went to the Salvation Army Store to buy her winter coat and was as happy as she could be. It's possible that some of the music in the music alcove came from that purchase.

Daily Restaurant Stories "Sarah's Stories"

(written in her own words)



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Editor's Note: When the first copy of the Johnson History was finished, I sent a copy to Sarah and asked for her comments. She replied by sending a set of stories written in her beautiful Palmer Script which she insisted did not need to be included. However, as I read them I decided of course, they are a delightful part of the Johnson History and I have included them.

"Ceiling - Mr. Red"

Now as my father was "hard of hearing" - my mother told the man that lived across the street (in a back room) that he could eat (free) if he would help churn the daily ice-cream - and that Mr. Johnson would give him a key to the back kitchen door if he would take a broom and slap it on the dining room ceiling to wake the family up - to start the day. Somehow, it seems to me (now) that I saw the places on the funny old front dining room ceiling, like indented holes. But it would wake my parents up.

"Burn Story and the Cowboy Sign"

This is another Brother Frank event at Johnson's. When Frank was just three, he had followed my father outside and my father didn't realize that he was there. Frank grabbed a handful of hot ashes. He got a serious burn (on his hand) and the doctors would come twice daily to care for him, but it was a serious case and he didn't sleep well (or maybe only just a little) and needed constant attention. One morning my mother heard a man saying "I'm glad that sign is up at the street corner". And then a customer came in and said, "Mrs. Johnson, has the sign at the corner by Murray's helped any?" "What sign" my mother asked? "Mrs. Johnson, the cowboys made a big sign printed on paper and wood which says "Cowboys, if you are wearing your spurs and they "jingle", don't walk down by Johnson's

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Restaurant. Their little boy has a very serious burn and if they get him to sleep the jingle of your spurs wakes him up. Walk over on the other side of the street . Thanks." My mother said they never heard any jingle again until about seven months later. My parents never knew who made the rough wood sign with that 'special' message. It was a beautiful message from yesterday's cowboys. "God bless that person or group of people" Sarah Trine.

"The Sisters and the Eggs"

There were four sisters that worked for people around town. One of them worked for my parents in the restaurant washing dishes. She was probably forty years old. She had a rather shrill sound to her voice, but worked fine. They had at least fifteen cats in their house. Really very different. Their father was living with them, but I think he was not too well. Now in the evening at the last part of the day, here they would all come to take their sister home. And they would go into our "cracker closet" to wait for her. I noted that Gracie always wore the same dress - real tight around her waist and it buttoned in the back. One night, I glanced in (the closet) and saw that they were undoing the back of Gracie's waist and they were slipping in eggs - just four eggs though! and they they buttoned up Gracie again and you could not see the eggs. I told my mother that night and she said "Yes, we know that they are just taking four eggs each night they come. But this way each one and their old father had an egg for their breakfast." My parents knew about the eggs, but never said a word or anything to them. Years later when the last sister could no longer care for herself and moved to the Nursing Home, Sarah recalls that she would go to see her and take her assorted cookies and candy that they both hid under her mattress. Sarah still puts flowers on the sisters' graves each Decoration Day.

"Big Mirror Story"

This article is about an event on the Johnson Restaurant side of the street. In the early days there were assorted frame buildings along our side. At the end of the street was a very popular Saloon; it was called the Tom Murry Saloon. Mr. Murry had a very nice beautiful home (he had it built for his wife who was rather shy and didn't mix too well; she was very pretty, but was younger than her husband). She painted and fired china dishes, bowls, etc. Lovely work. Mr. Murry had a back side (street side) door that was open for ladies so that they could shop for dishes, crystal pieces, toys, dolls etc. It was a section that was just for ladies and there was not any liquor etc. ever in the ladies part, just nice gifts or toys etc. Now also in a frame building this side of Murrys was a barn-like building that was the town fire house. In it were two big horses and the water wagon for any fires that might happen, and bales of hay for the horses. Now it was rather cold weather time. Frost, some cold winds etc, and this is how the event went. Two vagrant men (maybe looking for work or maybe just going through the town) but night found them very cold as a high wind had started blowing. Anyway, the strangers got into the firehouse and pulled hay down and made beds for keeping warm and sleeping. The horses were just near the men and other bales of hay. Apparently they smoked and somehow lost hot ashes in the hay beds they had made for the night. They escaped from the flames but a fire started in the fire station and this started a fire in Murry's Saloon and there was very little anyone could do to put it out. My mother got us (my father and the day's money) and we went down the outside stairs but we could hear and see the flying pieces of wood. I never really knew who the men were that formed a bucket line of water on our upstairs roof. I knew some of the men that often ate in the restaurant, and if it hadn't been for the water in the ditches in the front street and our faucets, the entire block would have burned.

My parents opened the front door and back door to anyone and everyone that came in - to have free coffee and my father made plates of hot cakes and sausage patties for the helpers. The firemen were exhausted. A sad thing. The firemen were able to save the big bar mirror and it finally ended up on the wall in Johnson's Restaurant and when I was moving I somehow could not take the big mirror away (it could tell all those long ago stories) So I left it on the "far wall". May it only reflect smiles and happy laughter for all of your tomorrows and shine on your dreams. It should stay on Main Street forever. S. Trine.

"The Piano Story"

You need to know about the piano that I took up to the Gunnison Museum. When I was in the second grade a lady I did not know came into the restaurant and said to my father, "Mr. Johnson, the law is closing down all our Sporting Houses and I don't know what to do with my piano. And I need to sell it." Now this piano was the first piano in Gunnison. It had been freighted over the Lake City road by mule team. (It was ordered for the New Opera House that was built near the LaVeta Area, but one night the frame Opera House caught on fire and it was very important to save the piano.) Who could store it, who could buy? There wasn't any real space for it at the time. So Irish Ann bought it for her Sporting House - a very elegant piece of furniture for any place or anyone. She used it a long time. My father said, "Ann, I don't know if we can afford a piano. You know there are four new eating places now on Main Street and meals are still 35c for all you can eat. Anyway I'll go and ask my wife, but I don't think we can afford it, but I wish we could, Ann." Then Irish Ann said, "Mr. Johnson, I want you and your family to have it. I'll sell it today somewhere - I have to close my 'house'." "How much will it cost me, Ann?" "Mr. Johnson, I'm selling it for \$40, but I wanted you to have first chance at it." My

parents said yes, and I never knew how they made the payment, but it was in the restaurant (I restored the piano years later in the restaurant and sometimes fed hungry college boys when it had to be moved).



Piano in the Johnson's Restaurant

"Pies"

In the early 1900's very seldom did women eat in restaurants. Though I do remember one lady during my early childhood. Every third weekend my father had to bake fifteen lemon pies for her and her crew who would be coming from Iola, Colorado (where Mesa Lake is now). Her name was Mrs. A. R. Stevens. She owned much land in that area. Mrs. Stevens and her crew always ate at Johnson's.

"Homemade Soap"

I do not know any recipe for "Homemade Soap" that was made to wash dishes, clothes, and floors (wood), but I do know it made a 'good job'. My parents saved all extra fry grease, bought "Red Seal" Lye and cooked it all night on the big black stove. When finished, it was poured into a wash tub - ready to clean the world.

"The Door That Was Closed"

Upstairs, on the side toward the theater, there was a nailed up door (in my father's room). Now the door was sealed up, but my folks kept an axe up there and Mrs. Myers kept an axe on her side. If a fire started burning up a room, she could chop through. She had five rooms to rent upstairs next to the restaurant, and she kept an axe on her side. Each of the rooms had a cast iron coal and wood stove in it. Sometimes we could hear the wood and coal burning, the wall was so weathered between the two buildings. It was a worry, especially in the winter nights. We could hear the people next door talking.

"The Horse Water Story"

You see there was a big barn and corral just across the alley. My father had two horses, maybe three in there and he had to carry water to them daily and also put hay down from the loft. These were the horses that he used to take the Denver salesmen around to the ranches for their winter food orders. He would take the better tempered horse (not the stallion). My mother didn't like the stallion and I guess he knew that because whenever she was out in the alley he would rare up and "snort" at her. I was afraid of him too. I remember when one day Mr. Lewis (from Denver) was waiting for my father to get the good mare harnessed to the surrey. When my father returned he said to my mother "Now Frankie, be sure you give the stallion water tonight as we may be late". My mother said "Sam, I'll take the bucket of water over to the corral and I'll throw it over the fence and if it stands up that black devil will have a drink and other wise he won't."



*Sam Johnson
and one of his
horses*

"A Good Smoke"

As there was always a big Estate Oak Heater in the front dining room, many little wooden boxes were placed around it, each with a big can of clean cold ashes in it - summer or winter. You see almost all the men smoked cigars, cigarettes, roll your own, and chewed tobacco. In the colder weather every chair would be used as a warm fire was going. It was a sort of meeting place for the men, after eating or washing up. Very few women ate in the street restaurants in those long ago days. Maybe in the hotel dining-rooms?

Now this story seems a part of the understanding of those long ago days. There was a cigar place over by Quinn and Hogan Saloon and a man from Germany made cigars for the Saloon owners mostly as they were expensive. They cost more than a meal in a restaurant. But one morning when it was cold outside, a regular 'rough work' fellow was standing by the stove and smoking one of the Famous German Cigars. Some cowboy said to him, in a voice that was really puzzled. "Geel! Ernie, how can you afford one of those expensive German cigars?" Ernie just looked at the other fellows and said, "Money is only money; but a good cigar is a smoke!" The lesson I remembered was like this. If you don't use money for pleasure or to help someone, it might as well be rocks or paper blowing down the street - or drifting down the grassy front ditch. Do good with your money.

"Chickens"

Although this article is not about the Johnson Building, it was in the restaurant. Where the Community Church is now, in the same area as Webster Hall, there was the barn and corral where my father kept two horses, a tiny two room "shed-like" house (never saw anyone ever living in it) and

an adobe shed way over to one side (about to fall down). I played along the ditch that was just along the edge of the lot. There was some grass in part of this big lot - nice and high when the ditch was running. Now we had a lot of dogs that would wander by the restaurant trash; we always owned at least three dogs; bull dogs, bird dogs, and St. Bernards. We truly loved them all. Now our bird dog started to bring dead chickens one-at-a-time and leave them by the back door. We had to put them in the 'high trash' as soon as we found them. We didn't know where they were coming from. Then one day a man who lived across the street (where my brother and sister-in-law lived, Elsie is still there) came storming into the back door and went to my father as said "You owe me \$3 - and I want it now". Now Mr. Coleman would turn his chickens out and they would wander over to the ditch and grassy area, but we didn't know or try to change any daily duties. But Mr. Coleman's chickens would wander over the road to the grass in the lot where the church is now. But we didn't know that our bird dog was killing them and bringing them to the restaurant back porch. It was almost the dinner hour and we were busy when Mr. Coleman came in. He was angry and stayed right by my father while he was cooking. Then I heard my father tell Mr. Coleman that he was sorry that our dog was killing his chickens. Then he asked Mr. Coleman if he had a license for his chickens. "Of course not, nobody has a license for chickens. They roam around for food". Then my father stopped cooking and said, "Oh! I have a license for my dog. It is on his collar and he can go anywhere. He is a bird dog, Mr. Coleman", and he went on cooking again.

"Night Law Story"

This is another "Cracker Closet Story". After the 'night law' would say hello to my father (who was rather hard of hearing), the 'night law' would slip under the curtain in the cracker closet where there was the little table and two chairs. I am very certain that the customers thought that he was visiting my 'cook' father in the kitchen. But he would slip under the 'Cracker Closet' curtains and sit there very quiet. Why? Because in our back kitchen door a very pretty lady would enter - saying nothing. She would also slip into the cracker closet. Her name was Edith and she was a "Madam" -prostitute- because she did not use any other women or girls. She was the only one that 'served' the men. They were top brass, church-going business men of Gunnison, many of them were married and had families. The night-law man was also married. But on a certain night, she would come in the back door - never say a thing - slip through the kitchen under the 'cracker closet' curtain and then my mother would serve them. They truly were very much in love. It was a special time for them and after they finished their meal (no physical contact) she would wave to my father and go out the back door. About five minutes later the 'night law' would slip into the kitchen again. Everyone in the dining room could hear him saying this or that and would think he had been in the kitchen all along. No one ever knew about that love affair of a long ago yesterday. My parents never said anything about this meeting - a strange, beautiful love story in a long-ago-restaurant.

"Chickens"

Although this article is not about the Johnson Building, it was in the restaurant. When the Community Church is now, in the same area as Webster Hall, there was the barn and corral where my father kept two horses, a fry two room "shed like" house (never saw anyone ever living in it) and

"Window Washing"

This is a different type of a story about the Johnson Restaurant. The First World War had now started and the local boys and men were being called to go to Europe to fight the Germans. One morning ((5:00 o'clock was the time to get ready for breakfast customers) my mother noticed paint and words were all over the front windows. "Go home German Bitch - so you can kiss the Kaiser's bare ass" (my mother was only eleven years old when she came to America). She washed the windows and did not say anything to my father. The next night they had the same type of message on them. Finally she told my father and he asked the 'night law' if they knew who was doing the words on the windows, but they didn't know. One night the 'night law' was coming down the street, and saw the late night activity by the front of the restaurant. Not sure that it was any wrong problem he went down the other side of the street. When he got just across from the restaurant front, he saw a man writing on the window. There were three men - two helpers. He started over to see what they were doing at Johnson's, but one of them saw him coming and they got into a car, leaving the white wash, bucket, etc. there on the front sidewalk in the front of the place. The police drew water from the ditch in front of the restaurant and cleaned up the walk and the next day the police said they would go in front of the restaurant several times each night. It stopped. Messages did not come on the big windows again, but it made us aware of how we were hated. When I went to school after that I would wonder if the children in the classroom hated me too because my mother came from Germany. Life was always a very different 'bunch of cherries' or tears.

"Colored Lights"

There is another story that is a part of the Johnson's Building. It was December and we had lots of snow in Gunnison. My mother kept the restaurant open because there was some men still working - doing the work that they could in the snow. Anyway, you had to keep the restaurant building warm to keep the water pipes warm - always a worry in the cold days (frozen pipes were lots of worry!) So the old black stove was truly important. One winter day Mr. Endner came over from his hardware store across the street and into the restaurant and said "Mrs. Johnson, I need to ask you a special question and favor" "What can I do for you Mr. Endner?" "Mrs. Johnson when I went to get my mail today I had a special box of colored (big light bulbs) lights. There are six of them and they are all different colors. I have never seen anything like this before. They are bigger than any light bulbs I sell in the store. Mrs. Johnson, I wonder if you would let me climb up on your building and I will make an electric wire that will hold all six of these colored lights and I can attach it to your building. I'll turn them on at night up in the sky." "Yes, Mr. Endner, you may climb up there on any part of the roof, but you know I only have an outside stairs to get up, so be careful so you won't fall. The stairs get icy right away even after we sweep them off. Be careful. Remember to come in both you and your helper. There is always hot coffee and cookies. Mr. Endner and his helper worked several very snowy days to make and get the right amount of electric wire. Finally the lights were made and fixed into their electric sockets. It was a cold Friday morning when Mr. Endner came in to the restaurant and said "I'm going to turn the lights on tonight, Mrs. Johnson". To us the lights were beautiful!!! And they shed their lights on the snow that was piled high in the street below. An article about the lights was also written in the Gunnison paper and people would either walk or come in a sleigh to see the 'wonderful

lights'. My mother kept the front door unlocked so people could come in and sit around the big black cook stove or sit by the big heater in the dining room. And there was always hot coffee or tea and cookies, long ago, long ago.

"My Father's Story"

Both my parents died upstairs in Johnson's. I was by my father's bed holding my brother's crippled hand, and I could feel his tears drop on my arm. My mother's only sister, Mrs. Lottie Anderson, had come in from her ranch to be with my mother. My father died about 2:30 in the morning hours. I know that they had to take a wooden door off one of the upstairs rooms to put my father on so he could be taken down the outside stairs. Many men came to help carry his body down that old wood stairs. I knew only a few of the men, but they were very gentle and he was taken on the door down the stairs, back into the restaurant and put on the big table in the dining room. I still remember how hard my mother was crying. My mother would not let the undertaker, Mr. Adams, take my father to his place (over by today's post office). So he brought all his tools over to the restaurant and embalmed him in the front dining room. My mother pressed his best tie and cloth shirt with the old cast iron. Mr. Adams brought his casket to the restaurant. The curtains were all shut but that afternoon I went into the dining room to comb my father's hair again and someone was knocking on the front door. I went to open it as I was certain Mr. Adams had returned. But it was Ruth Walker, the teacher from school and her class of 6th and 7th grade students. She lined them up and told them about my father and how he had been a credit to Gunnison. She had them walk around the casket and then wait until she went to the kitchen area to see my mother.

Up to this time in Gunnison the only hearse in town was drawn by horses, but the Miller family had bought a hearse the week before my father's death that was like a motor car. Mr. Adams told my mother about the 'car hearse' and that if she wanted Mr. Johnson to be the first person to be carried to the Odd Fellows Cemetery in a 'car driven hearse' it would be all right with him. Mr mother's answer, "Thank you Mr. Adams for telling me, but I'll use your hearse. Mr. Johnson will go to the cemetery behind a horse" - and he did. The people that knew my father knew how he loved horses. He was carried to the Gunnison Cemetery by horses.

Then came the day when I held my brother's hand beside my mother's bed upstairs above the restaurant. Tears were falling as we watched my mother close her eyes and her breathing became so soft. A streak of late spring sunlight streamed across the front room and across her bed, and she was asleep forever, far away from Hamburg, Germany.

"My Father's Bed"

My father had a separate bedroom as he had to turn often to ease the two 'ruptures'. There were only curtains hanging between the two rooms and that room had one window in it that looked out the back to the alley. But it was a window that was opened for the fresh air daily. After my father's death, my mother had two men take his bed apart and bury it in the big back yard. Someone asked her why, and I heard her say "no other man will sleep in Mr. Johnson's bed". And no one did. But during the years when everyone had to connect with the sewer district in Gunnison in all the alleys and back yards, pieces of the bed would be dug up, but no one ever said or told about the bed parts or ever said where they came from.

"Poncho"

Harry and I had purchased the restaurant from Frank and Elsie and worked early and late. World conditions were at a low. Many people were out of work. The winter had been long and cold and it was a problem to keep downstairs and upstairs water from freezing. A high school boy carried coal every evening and one day he fell on the ice in the back yard. The Dr. said he was not to carry coal for sometime. So Harry and I carried it in!!

It was in the afternoon on a cold winter day when the front door opened and a little boy came in to the dining room. I said, "Hello, how's everything going for you?" I noticed he had rather ragged shoes on and was wearing a hat far too big for him. (He was in the third grade) I knew his parents, but they were doing odd jobs as there were two other children in the family. They had to move several times from one house to another and one town to another.

This is the "why of the story". "Hi, what can I do for you on this cold day?" He looked straight at me and said, "Dean can't carry the coal anymore, so I'm going to!" (Now how did he even know that the high school boy had hurt his back and could not carry the coal - I do not even know today.) "Theodore, you can't carry the coal for that big stove!! It's icy outside and cold and you might slip and fall, and that wouldn't be good for you. Here is a dish of ice cream and cake and a cup of hot cocoa." He sat down at the little kitchen table and ate the cake and ice cream and came over by me and said, "I'll carry coal for the big warm stove" I said, "Are you that strong? And he said, "I will carry some for you now, and I put a coat on and took him out to the coal shed. I only let him carry two buckets and I helped him with them. Then I gave him a quarter because he said he needed a new pencil and I put his other quarter in a special cup for him - up high on the cook shelf. I was

very certain that he would only return maybe two times, but he came every day. We fed him, gave him his two quarters but we put one of them in his special cup on the cook shelf. All he bought with it was pencils. As the story goes, he liked Harry very much and Harry said "that boy is okay".

His mother came one day and said the boys were going to go up to Pitkin. They could go to school up there and help 'skid logs'. She had a job and knew her husband would go to work also. Theodore would come in to visit when they came to town, but not too often. He said he was in school when they didn't have to skid. The winter passed and the snow was gone when one day Theodore came in the back door and asked Harry if he could carry the coal again. Now there was already another boy carrying coal for his money for school, but Harry said, "Sure you can always work for me. I'll pay you, but you only get to keep half of you daily money and I'll keep the other half in the little safe for you." That was okay with Theodore; and he would turn up at different times each day always willing to help or carry.

Now he was getting older and one day Harry said, "I'm going to teach you to cook and you can go to work for me!" But there was only one problem. Harry couldn't remember Theodore's name and one day just after we had a delivery from the stores, Harry was standing by a crate of tomatoes with the name "Poncho Villa" on the side. Harry hollered at Theodore and said, "I got a new name for you. It's Poncho!" and to this day he is Poncho. Harry taught him to cook and he slept in the cabin in the back yard. He stayed all season with us until his mother took him to Arizona. Finally, we took a trip to Arizona and on our way back we stopped to see Poncho. But his sister said he didn't live there. He was sleeping in a car in a vacant lot, and he was helping a man gather iron and old metal. We found the place and he was there. But he told us why he didn't live with his mother. She had a man friend living with her and he wanted

Poncho to throw some very special metal piece over the fence to him. Poncho would not steal the metal from the man he was working for even though the man had beaten him with a leather strap because he would not steal the iron piece.

Harry said, "Poncho, you be on the road somewhere toward the next town and I'll take you back to Colorado with me." The next morning about three, farther down the road, Poncho was sitting on his tin suitcase. He came, he learned to cook, he went to war (and that was so sad for Harry) but when he came back he worked at the restaurant. He married a girl that came from Delta to go to Western State and she worked at the restaurant too. But one day when he was looking in the paper he noticed an ad for a man to clean and fill the big oil tanks and ships when they docked in California. Harry told him to apply, and he got the job. Pat, his wife, went to a business college in California. Then the oil company asked Poncho (they called him Ted) if he would be willing to go up to Alaska for more salary. So Pat and Poncho and their little daughter said a sad, sad goodbye, got in their little, tiny car, and drove away. Today they could buy and sell me many times. They now own two houses in Alaska, a dive shop, a condo in Mexico, a big boat in dock in California. They often take trips in it. They still stay part of the time in Alaska. Pat teaches in a business college and makes good money, too. They are very special to me and it all happened when a little boy with a big hat and torn shoes said, "I'll carry a half bucket of coal". Strange that half a bucket of coal could make such a difference in all our lives. Poncho was a pall bearer at Harry's funeral and made the trip to lay Harry to that long, long sleep.

"Kitchen Floors"

In the spring just before we would open up for the season, we always had to paint the big kitchen floor and all the girls put on black garbage sacks with holes cut for their heads for the painting. And we scrubbed both the middle dining room (where the big black stove was) and the kitchen cement floor every night. The girls all had 'scrub shoes' because everyone had to help and there was lye in the scrub water (we never had cockroaches or mice). But all the girls that worked for Johnson's were never considered "hired help" they were all very special people.



All dressed up to serve customers during Cattleman's Days

"The Intruder"

As I was still running the restaurant and the many people that had been working at Johnson's were away, away, away. No one was living upstairs as my help were from their own family homes, just working for the summer season, making a little money for school clothes etc. After the middle dining room was scrubbed and the girls had all gone to their homes I would separate soiled linens into separate piles so I could do the laundry for the next day. Sometimes I would have to 'slap' the ice maker (it was getting older and me too) and I would sleep on the couch by the big black cook stove although it was not being used for heat, and it had different old time articles on it such as cast iron waffle irons, old slaw boards, and the old tea can that had been the hiding place for the "clean garbage quarters" that had helped make the first down payment on the restaurant. It was around 2:00 o'clock when I heard a noise in the kitchen. I knew it was the ice machine and I simply had to attend to it. If I didn't there would not be any ice when we opened up. I was tired and I didn't want to go out into the kitchen to slap the sides of the machine!!! I was close to the swinging doors and did not take time to put on shoes (bare feet). Anyway, the kitchen floor was clean (cleaned every night after closing just ask any of yesterday's help and they'll say "Yes! Yes! Yes!) I pushed open the double wood doors to the back kitchen to give that blasted ice machine a good whack. But it wasn't the ice machine that was making the funny noise. Just on the cash register side of the table was a big man just ready to open the register. Now I was barefoot and scared and I was very much aware of the assorted steel cooking knives that lay in a straight row on his side of the table So I knew I couldn't run fast enough, unlock the front door and run out into the street. So I just screamed at him and told him to leave. I noticed that he had removed a back window to get in. I know you'll wonder why I hadn't heard him entering the

kitchen. You just don't live on Main Street all of your life and question, "what is that noise?"

I did not dare to turn back into the middle dining room, so I just started screaming at him. "You get right out of that same place you came in because I can step into the room I just came out of and ring the police!!!" I could not have done that! There wasn't any telephone in there and I knew I couldn't run fast enough to get out my own front door in time. So I kept screaming at him and silently praying "get out, get out, get out!" "I'm going to ring the big bell. Just get out that same window you came in" and I started to open the door to the middle room. It was my only way to make him go (maybe) God willing!! Anyway, I know God is busy, but somehow He heard me and the intruder ran to go out the window, but he made a wrong jump and went through a glass window. As soon as I thought he was gone, I got down on my knees so if he was watching he would think I was phoning the law from the supposed other phone. But I ran into some extra glass trouble, the broken window pieces lay shattered over the kitchen floor all around the telephone. I didn't know where he really was, maybe going to come in his "first window". So I had to crawl on my knees to get to the phone. All I had to help go through the shattered glass was one griddle cloth. I tried to keep it wound around my bare knees on the floor, but finally I got to the telephone (just a few cuts) and I called the police. They said to stay where I was and not to expose myself. They were there in a few minutes. I heard them rattle the front door and opened it and three police came in. They went out the back with flashlights. I put paper towels around my cut legs and just kept waiting.

They did not catch him, but they did find blood spots fresh in the garage floor on the Webster Hall side. I tied up my knees, put on my clothes and stayed in the front part of the restaurant. It was going to be morning light soon. Soon a

policeman came in and said, "I am to stay with you until daybreak or after if you need me". I had to start the day anyway. I began with kissing the ice machine or I might have had a different story. I hardly got the laundry done and the days menu started when the people from the local newspaper wanted the story about the "intruder". So between new little bandages on my legs and knees, Johnson's would be open for business!!

I didn't buy a new ice machine. We both were getting old together. The only ones that made any money out of this event was the drug store - for bandages. But I am 87 years old now (knees seem to work okay). And God willing I'm trying for 90 years old!

SARAH

Sarah was educated in the Gunnison Schools, Pine Street School through the High School and then on to Western State, but it wasn't until 1958 that Sarah returned to college and graduated from Western State in 1960 prepared to teach elementary school. She and Harry moved to California where she taught 2nd grade for 11 years and was named "Teacher of the Year".

In 1980 Sarah was named the Gunnison County Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year. She was described as a "quiet helper of people" who helped many old-time Gunnison residents taking them food and clothing. Everyone was aware that as many people were fed out the back door as out the front door of the Johnson Restaurant.

Sarah was inducted into the Colorado-Wyoming Restaurant Association's Hall of Fame. The induction is "to recognize and honor those individuals who have made major contributions to the food service industry and their communities". In 1981 Sarah was named the WSC Alumni Association's Good Will Ambassador.

In the last years that the restaurant was open Sarah received lots of help from her friends to run and maintain the Johnson Restaurant. But there was always a pot of soup on the stove so everyone could sit down and eat a meal together when the work was done.

On the last day that she was in the building, after having packed away and put in storage many of her treasures one of her former "girls" came in to visit. When she walked in the door, Sarah said, "O.K. now I want you to go out in back and get a mop and one of those old buckets and scrub this floor because I can't turn this building over with this floor looking like this. The "girl" said "Sarah, there isn't even any water in this building now." But Sarah said, " You can go next door and get some water". So the "girl" went out back and dug an old mop and a beaten up bucket from a snowdrift, got the water and scrubbed the floor. That was Sarah.

When Sarah turned the lock in the door the last day she was in Gunnison, she said, "I'll never be back". After signing the final papers for the sale of the building she was asked how she felt and she said, "well, I'm sober". She gave the Tredways a book of poems and signed her initials to the poem that means so much to her. It's called:

GHOST TOWN HOUSE

How does a house die?
First, someone shuts the door.
Then stories strike hard
to shake the chinking loose
And cold settles in a down-draft
Through a sodden flue
Glass shatters or is stolen
Leaving hungry holes
The floors break through
Where memory grows too heavy for the joist
The rats gnaw tediously along with time
In little bites.

So, a home dies
But death begins the day
the one who loves it
Locks the door.

Sarah's whole history, her life, her family were in the Johnson Building.

1942 Menu

Johnson's Restaurant

THE PLACE TO EAT

Hope for the Best, but Prepare for the Worst

All Complaints Cordially Listened to and Quickly Forgotten

If You Notice a Slight Advance in Prices, Please don't Complain
THE WORST IS YET TO COME

Meals Served All Hours of the Day and Part of the Night
EXCEPT WHEN WE GO FISHING

If You Are too Modest to Giggle, a Smile Hurts Nobody

If You Never Come Again, Remember Us to Your Friends

- S A M -

THE JOHNSON BUILDING GALLERY

In January of 1996, Doug and Kaylonn Tredway and Dan and Nancy Tredway bought the Johnson Building from Sarah Trine. They spent the next several months restoring and renovating both floors of the building and then opened the Johnson Building Gallery in September. They kept as much of the historical part of the building as was possible. The old cast iron cook stove is used for display in the Gallery. The safe, the potato peeler, the benches and old tables all had their place at one time or another in the restaurant. After peeling off 6 layers of wallpaper and some heavy wallboard, the Tredways exposed the original wainscoting on some of the walls and the tongue and groove in the ceiling of the front room is part of the original building. The alcove which had housed the grand piano was moved to the south wall, sheet music, window, and all. The narrow little stairway was returned to its original location with an outside entrance and stairway to the upstairs offices. As linoleum was pulled up from the floor, layer after layer of history was revealed down to the newspapers from 1905 which covered the wood of the original floor.

One can still get a feeling of the history of the building as you walk in the door. It is one of Gunnison's most historical treasures.

Many thanks to Ann Zugelder, the Gunnison Public Library, The Gunnison Country Times, Audrey and Sid Dickinson, Nancy Pressler, Vicci Carricato, Kaylonn and Doug Tredway and the many, many friends of the Johnson Building who shared stories and pictures for this booklet.

Sarah's FAMOUS Corn Relish Recipe

1 gallon cut corn
2 cups chopped onion
2 cups chopped green pepper
2 cups chopped red pepper
4 Tbs. dry mustard
2 Tbs. mustard seed
2 Tbs. celery seed
2 Tbs. salt
2 Tbs. turmeric
4 cucumbers chopped
4 cups sugar
2 quarts vinegar (use only the best)
2 cups water

Boil all ingredients together until the sugar is dissolved and seasonings mixed. If canning, process 20 minutes. If not, cool and refrigerate. Relish will keep several weeks in refrigerator.

“Our best wishes for long casts and a full creel in the years ahead”