

Annie L. Morrison and John H Haydon, 1917, *History of San Luis Obispo County and environs, California, with biographical sketches of the leading men and women of the county and environs who have been identified with the growth and development of the section from the early days to the present* (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company), pp. 630

NIELS JOHNSON. – Niels Johnson is a representative citizen of Templeton, and the pioneer of the wood business that has meant so much to every farmer in this section of the county: for when crops were poor or there were no crops at all, the timber could always be depended upon to yield a living and pay taxes, and it was through Mr. Johnson that a market was found and ready money was forthcoming. He was born in Naskoo, Denmark, March 21, 1850, a son of Johan and Maren Rasmussen. His father, a farmer and blacksmith, was twice married, and Niels Johnson of this review is the youngest of four children born of the first marriage.

Niels Johnson was reared in his native land until he was nineteen, when he set out for himself and came to America, locating in Oshkosh, Wis., where he was employed in the lumber mills on Wolf river for one year. Then he went to Green Bay, and in 1871 came to California. He went to the lumber section in Mendocino county and worked one winter, and then came back to San Jose and followed farm pursuits. In 1876 he was united in marriage at San Jose to Miss Mary Jane Dunbar, a native of New York State. She came to California with her sister, Mrs. Maria Carr, and lived in Alameda county.

After their marriage Mr. Johnson went to Salinas, where he followed ranching, purchased and improved a place near there, and then sold out and moved to Castroville. He was one of the first men to ship wood from that town to San Jose, where he found a market; he also bought land and farmed for a time, but sold and moved to Watsonville. In the early days in that section the fruit business was a fiasco, for there was no sale for the fruit. The best of land was selling for \$250 per acre, which was thought the limit; but it has quadrupled since. In 1889, Mr. Johnson sold out and moved to Templeton and bought one thousand acres adjoining the town on the south. He cleared some of the land, plowed it and put in grain, and carried on general farming and stock-raising, with fine results.

A great deal of timber was on Mr. Johnson's land, and he cut a certain amount for wood each year and figured on a certain income from that source, he has also engaged in buying wood on a large scale and has found a ready market in San Jose and San Francisco, handling about one thousand cords annually. At first the market for wood was poor, but by dint of perseverance he has built up and maintained a regular demand, and this yields a steady income to those who are clearing their land and cutting wood. For ten years Mr. Johnson has supplied the Western Meat Co., in San Francisco and Oakland, with white oak wood for smoking their meats, he considers that the wood business at Templeton has been the backbone of the community's prosperity.

Besides his home place Mr. Johnson farmed twelve hundred acres on the Santa Margarita ranch about six years, and at another time had twenty-five hundred acres leased on the Carissa plains, from 1898 to 1900, using a

combined harvester for gathering his crop, and a caterpillar engine for hauling and for plowing, besides using other modern machinery in the conduct of his ranch work. In 1913 he sold his ranch and at once made another purchase of nine hundred acres near Templeton ; then he sold six hundred of this and still retains three hundred acres. He also bought his present block in Templeton, where he has his residence and also a livery and feed stable.

To Mr. and Mrs. Johnson nine children were born. Ernest runs the livery stable: Lulu, Mrs. Fritz Clausen, lives in Templeton; Maria, Mrs. Edward Anderson, lives near Templeton; Emma, Mrs. Wessel, is at Santa Barbara; Edward stays on the home ranch; Harry is ranching east of the town; and Grace is at home with her father. Mrs. Johnson passed away in April, 1913, and seven weeks later a son, Clayton, died at the age of twenty. Maud died at the age of twelve years. Mr. Johnson has served as a school trustee for many years. He is a member of the San Luis Obispo Lodge, No. 322, B. P. O. E. In his political affiliations a Republican, he was the nominee of his party for supervisor of District No. 5 two different times; but while he carried his own town, the greater population was in the other end of the district and so defeated him.

Mr. Johnson is an enterprising man. He was one of the organizers of the Templeton Flour Mills Co., and a director from the starting of the building, for which the lumber was hauled from Pismo. The mill was erected as a full roller-process mill. It was expected that this enterprise would build up the community; but after operating for a few years, the company ran behind and became seriously involved, and Mr. Johnson with two others, Thos. Petersen and Owen O'Neil, liquidated it. In all of his business dealings Mr. Johnson has endeavored to follow the Golden Rule, and the result is that his integrity and honesty of purpose are unquestioned.