



Archives

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Judge Livingstone Morris Johnson December 27, 1927 - February 24, 2023
the 'consciousness' of Allegheny County Common Pleas Court

Written by Janice Crompton for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 3-13-2023



Retired Allegheny County Judge Livingstone Johnson saw much in his 95 years, from combat in war, to the sting of discrimination, to the joys of his many professional and personal accomplishments – and was made a better man for it.

"He touched many, many people. It's a huge loss," said lawyer Kim Brown. "That mold is broken for sure."

"Judge Livy" as he was known to friends, was so widely admired as a county Common Pleas Court judge for 34 years that the late state Superior Court Judge Eugene B. Strassburger III referred to him as "the consciousness of the court."

Judge Johnson, of McCandless, also a notable civil rights activist and former assistant county solicitor, died February 24 after a series of health problems.

He came from a long line of overachievers.

The son of Oliver Livingstone Johnson, the county's first Black assistant district attorney, and the elder brother of the late Justin Johnson, the second African-American to serve on the state Superior Court, much was expected of Judge Johnson growing up in Wilkinsburg. He didn't disappoint.

Though he excelled academically, it was his time as a Boy Scout that left a deep imprint on his young spirit. When he was 12, Judge Johnson joined a local troop, where he would eventually become an Eagle Scout.

"One of the most important things you have to understand about my dad is that he was incredibly, deeply loyal" recalled his daughter Lee Carol Johnson Cook of Oak Hill, Virginia. "Some of the boys in his class invited him to join their Boy Scout troop and they happen to be white, as well as their leader, Bert."

One of their badge requirements was learning to swim, but when the troop went to a local pool for lessons, Judge Johnson – the only Black child – was turned away.

"They refused to let my dad get into the pool, so Burt told the other kids, 'Get out of the pool,' and they did, no questions asked," Ms. Cook said. "So, Bert took them to North Park and taught them to swim in a lake."

Bert's actions that day made an impression on all of the boys - but especially on Judge Johnson.

"Bert was only 22 years old, but he stood up and my dad never forgot that. To me, that's the epitome of why my dad did the things he did. He was someone who was determined to always do the right thing," His daughter said. "He supported LGBT rights, women and other ethnic groups, and all of that went back to Bert and what he did at the pool."

Later in life, Judge Johnson was honored with a distinguished service award and the creation of the Livingstone M. Johnson Legacy Endowment Award by the Laurel Highlands Council of Boy Scouts. "He was really overwhelmed," his daughter said.

In 1945, he graduated from Wilkinsburg High School as the only Black student in his class. He would later be among the first inducted into the Wilkinsburg High Wall of Fame in 2010.

In a Post-Gazette story marking the occasion, Judge Johnson recalled what one of his high school teachers said about Black history. "He said that Black people ought to be grateful for slavery, since they were fed and supported all that time," he said in a 2010 story. "When I told my mother what he said, she told me he was wrong, that I couldn't listen to things like that."

But by that time the family was accustomed to rampant racism especially after what his parents went through purchasing a home on Ross Avenue in Wilkinsburg in the 1920s. "My parents had to use a straw purchaser –a lawyer and friend who was white – to buy our house in Wilkinsburg, which was an almost exclusively white suburb when we came along," Judge Johnson told the Post-Gazette in 2021. "The KKK had marches in front of the house when they found out," he said in a 2010 Post-Gazette story, adding that a group of his father's friends would stand armed guard on the ground floor so that his parents could get some sleep. In 1949 Judge Johnson earned a bachelors degree from Howard University in Washington DC. He served in the university ROTC program and was called to active duty with the Air Force shortly after graduation.

As a navigator and radar bombardier, Judge Johnson flew 58 combat missions in the Korean War, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and other medals before his honorable discharge in 1954. In 1963, he was among the charter members of the Hall of Valor at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum in Oakland.

He earned a law degree from the University of Michigan in 1957 and joined his father's law practice, then called Johnson and Johnson. When his brother Justin joined several years later, the firm was expanded to Johnson, Johnson & Johnson.

He became an assistant county solicitor in 1962 and began his civil rights activism in earnest by representing the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh to ensure the hiring of Black staff members by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"He was a trailblazer and we were grateful for his longtime leadership and support," said Carlos T Carter, President and CEO of the Urban League and his role as chair and chief negotiator of the United Negro Protest Committee Judge Johnson work for similar equal hiring rights at Duquesne Light Company.

When her father served as chairman of the Pittsburgh Friends of Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) freedom center, the building came under attack, his daughter recalled. "My dad would take me to meetings at COFO when I was little. I would sit at the end of the conference table and draw pictures," she said. "One day, someone shot the entire office up, through a plate glass window in a conference room where meetings were held. There was glass and bullets everywhere. If we had been in there, we'd all have been killed. I can remember him having to get our phone tapped because of all of the death threats."

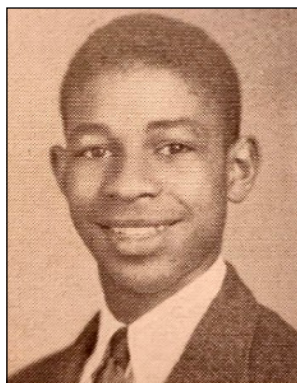
In 1957, Judge Johnson met Lee Brun Johnson and though it was love at first sight for him, it wasn't for her – at least not at that time.

"My father saw my mother at the Omega Psi Phi fraternity picnic and he thought, "Oh my goodness!" His daughter said. "He asked her to dance, but my mother thought he was a married man because he was surrounded by his younger cousins. He was crushed." Eventually, he persuaded mutual friends to introduce them formally. "She agreed to talk to him and he started courting her," his daughter said. "His way of courting my mother was to take her to civil rights meetings." The couple were married at Heinz Chapel on April 30, 1960 and lived at their 6 acre property in O'Hara they called "the Calmwood." Mrs. Johnson died in 2020.

Due to space limitations, the entire obituary of Judge Johnson can not be reproduced here. More information about the Judge's judicial years and his surviving family is in the second half of the obituary. The second half of Janice Crompton's Post-Gazette obituary for Judge Johnston can be found online using the following link:

<https://www.post-gazette.com/news/obituaries/2023/03/13/judge-livingstone-morris-johnson-the-consciousness-of-common-pleas-court/stories/202303120105>

Additionally, there are five different YouTube video interviews featuring Judge Livingstone Johnson & his brother Judge Justin Johnson. Google "YouTube Judge Livingstone Johnson"



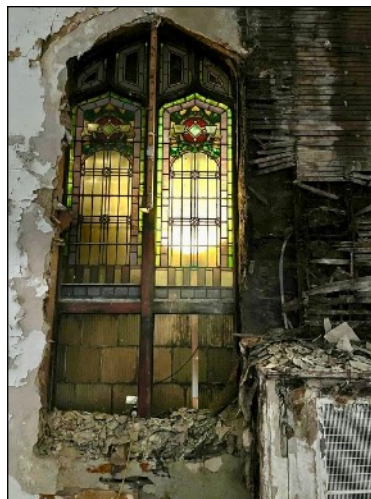
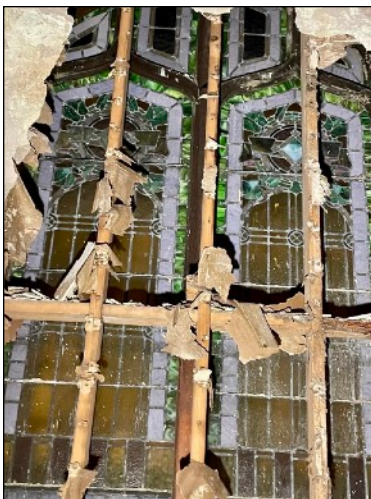
JOHNSON, LIVINGSTONE MORRIS—Classical. Intra-mural Basketball 4; Baseball 4; Hi Ways 2; Band 4. Clubs: Drama 2; Latin 2, 3, 4; Spanish 2, 3, 4; Science 4.

This is the 1945 Wilkinsburg High School *Annual* yearbook entry for Livingstone Johnson. He was a well-rounded young man, involved with sports, music, Latin club, Spanish club and Science. He was also the only Black student in his graduating class of 354.

Thanks to long-time Wilkinsburg resident Clif McGill for providing information about the Johnsons. The Johnson family (Livingstone's parents) joined St. Mark AME Church, (corner of Glenn Avenue and Montier St.), in 1922 after moving to Wilkinsburg. Clif remembers in 1960 when the Johnson family invited the McGill family to dinner at their Ross Avenue home shortly after Clif's father Rev. Sam McGill became the pastor of St. Mark AME church. Judge Livingstone Johnson remained a life-long member of St. Mark AME Church.

The Uncovered Stained-Glass Windows of Mulberry Second Presbyterian Church by Jennifer Kandray

Unearthing new historical content when restoring an antique structure, though rare, produces feelings of intense joy for the entire preservation team. So, when it happens the event is a *big* deal. In the neighborhood of Wilkinsburg in Pittsburgh, the site for the new Center for Civic Arts, currently in the process of restoration, lies the former Mulberry Second Presbyterian Church. Recently, the team uncovered *intact* stained-glass windows that were sandwiched between walls when one of two additions was built. The significance of the windows, other than their undoubted beauty, lies in multiple factors. The windows consist of one single piece of glass instead of the more common mosaic assembly of multiple pieces of a single color. Believed to have designed multiple stained glass windows for the church Henry Hunt Studio (now Hunt Stained Glass Studio) still operates in the South Side of Pittsburgh on West Carson Street.



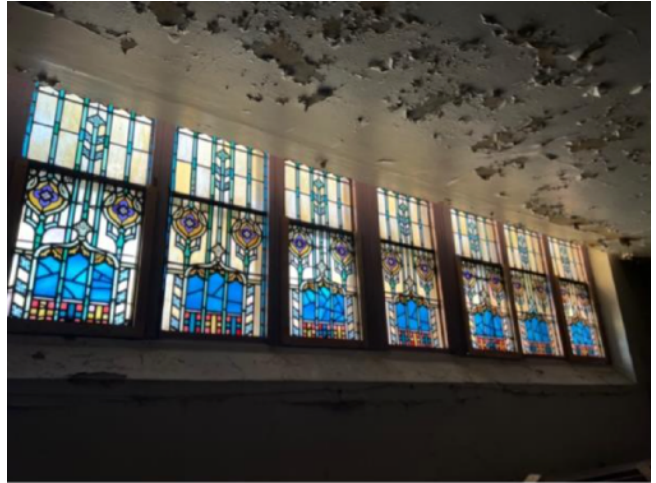
Intact stained-glass windows of the 1905 church were discovered within the walls, covered over when the education wing was added in 1928. With illumination, they are outstanding!



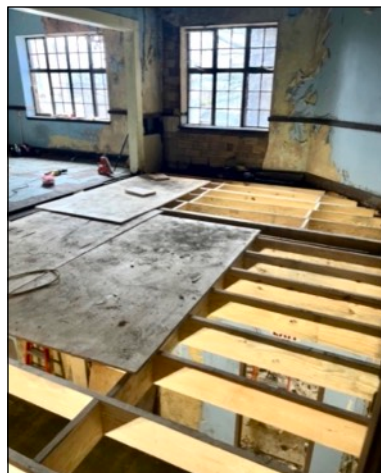
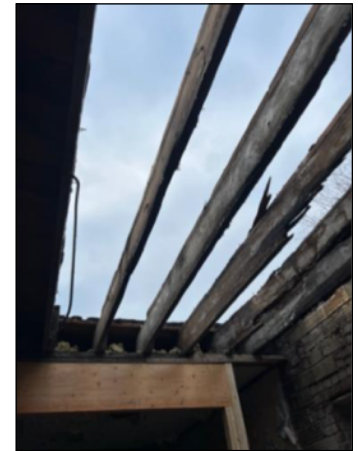
The recently uncovered stained glass windows can be seen in the middle of the long side in this 1905 photo of the original church on Mulberry St. Later, in 1911 the church was enlarged by connecting a huge new worship space (not shown) on the corner of South Avenue and Mulberry. The final addition in 1928, (shown in a 2021 photo), was the 28 room education wing with a Children's Chapel extending to Franklin Avenue.

Update on renovations at Center for Civic Arts, formerly Mulberry Presbyterian Church

Great news! CfCA (Center for Civic Arts) has recovered four of the stained glass windows stolen in 2019 from the 1911 sanctuary. In late fall 2022 CfCA received a report from a friend who saw the missing stained glass windows in a salvage warehouse. We exchanged photographs and were amazed that the windows were a perfect match, and in decent condition. The four windows that could be opened to provide ventilation were easy targets for the thieves to remove without compromising the condition of the stained glass and their frames. The owner of the salvage warehouse reported that he had removed the windows with the blessing of the prior owner of the church, and that he paid a small sum of money for the four windows which CfCA reimbursed to the salvager. Jeff Green, Center for Civic Arts building manager, was able to clean and rehang the missing windows. The windows will no longer provide ventilation, but will provide extraordinary light and color that streams through the windows daily around 4 PM.



This is the remaining roof joist in the 1928 classroom shown below. In early 2023 Jendoco Construction replaced supporting headers, the roofing joist, and constructed a new floor (seen below) multiple repairs like this were done throughout the CfCA education wing. The 24- classroom education wing is the first phase of exterior and interior redevelopment to be completed early 2025 when CfCA's first anchor tenant, a school, will occupy 80% of the Education Wing. Email civicarts211@gmail.com for more information



The school entrance ceiling sustained significant water damage. Now the ceiling and floor above it are replaced and the area stabilized. For the first time in a decade or more the building is dry and protected from additional rain. Now we're onto a new flat roof and solar panels. CfCA has received capital funding from the State Historical and Preservation Office, the Hillman Foundation, and an anonymous donor.



Don't miss out on **The Wilkinsburg Sun**, a free monthly community newsletter published by the volunteer Wilkinsburg Community Newsletter Board, with the support of the Wilkinsburg Borough, the Wilkinsburg School District, the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce and the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation.

The Sun accepts submitted articles provided they are related to Wilkinsburg and are civic-minded.

<https://wilkinsburgsun.wordpress.com>

Sign up to receive The Sun by email at:

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Wilkinsburg Historical Society has a website, to share more information about the history of Wilkinsburg. wilkinsburghistory.wordpress.com

Mailing address: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P.O. Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235**

The "Archives" Historical Society newsletter is published monthly, March through November.

We do not usually publish the Archives during the three Winter months of December, January and February.

Wilkinsburg Historical Society yearly dues for the Wilkinsburg Historical Society are:

\$20.00 INDIVIDUAL Member, \$35.00 FAMILY Membership

\$10.00 STUDENT or ASSOCIATE Members Please keep your membership dues up to date.

Contributions are needed for "Lights for Lincoln", to get improved lighting for the Lincoln Plaza area. Abraham Lincoln stands in the dark after sun-down. Your donation can help us illuminate this outstanding area overlooking the Lincoln Highway.

Wilkinsburg Historical Society - Membership application
Help promote the valuable history of Wilkinsburg.

Name _____

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City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

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() \$10 Student or associate membership

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Please make check payable to: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society**
PO Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

Anytime is a good time to pay your dues for the Wilkinsburg Historical Society. We have many preservation projects going on, and providing displays for Wilkinsburg events. Many thanks to those of you who have already sent in your membership dues. Please use the address on the form, our PO box.