

Johnston Foundation
Bob Johnston & Bob Johnston Jr.
Family History
Heritage Park 2019

Joan Mertz, Margaret Mertz Iott and Katie Mertz Johnson and cousin David H. Lott, III from Mineola, honored their grandfather, Bob Johnston, Sr. and his son, Bob Johnston Jr., whose foundation from Pueblo, Colorado donated funds for Heritage Park.

Bob Johnston Sr. was the son of Marion Johnston who came to North Dallas in 1852 with his family from Shelbyville, Illinois. They had family friends that said Texas was great country so they came and had a large family. Marion became an oxen freighter. He had teams of oxen and the family still has bells that were worn by the oxen team. He delivered freight to forts of the West. He went to Fort Chadbourne, Fort Concho and Fort McKavett. He also freighted down to Houston, New Orleans and east Texas.

In the early part of the civil war Marion Johnston was captured. When they let him go, he got only his oxen back and four mares. That is all he was given. He then went back and bought his own land in Dallas County and his family was born there. Later Marion's son, Bob Johnston Sr. and Katherine Duke Johnston from Paducah, Kentucky married and started a family. Their children were Bob Johnston Jr, Ruth Johnston Lott and Marolyn Johnston Mertz. All the children were born at home on Hackberry Creek.

Photographs of the Johnston children show them playing in wagons and in the background, there are always turkeys, chicken and horses. During her life Marolyn Johnston always talked about how they had grown up immersed in this wonderful farm life. That very sentiment though irritated Granddaddy Bob and he said "If I stick around here, I'm going to have to milk cows." Everybody was going into the dairy business and they were usually near creeks. There was Elm Creek and Hackberry Creek and they flooded numerous times. There are stories told about having to get up in the middle of the night and as family go and pull cattle out of the bog.

Still wanting to pursue a different life, Bob Sr. came out to West Texas to visit some friends name Demery that lived in Water Valley. He and a friend rode

horseback from Dallas County all the way to Tom Green County and camped along the way. It stuck in Bob's mind that West Texas was cattle country so he wanted to move. In 1927 he packed up his family in an old Buick and headed west. One of the saddest stories happened as they were coming out to San Angelo with everything packed in the car. They stopped along the way to rest and let the dogs out and being hound dogs they picked up on the scent of a rabbit and ran away. His sister told the story that the rest of the trip in the car Bob was very dejected and sad. The family had waited as long as they could but eventually had to leave, leaving their cherished four-legged friends behind.

They arrived in San Angelo and leased land near Water Valley where other Johnston family was already living. Near that time, the lease for the XQZ near Christoval came up which seemed a much better place to Bob and he decided to lease it. Bob let go of Water Valley and leased the XQZ for the next 20 years.

Bob Johnston Sr. always talked about what he called the big steer fever and that's what he wanted. He wanted to have lots of animals and he believed that volume and big numbers were the keys to success.

There was a story that Stanley Frank wrote in 1971 in the Livestock Weekly about Bob Johnston Sr. They had been great friends and Stanley felt that Bob had worked hard but somehow always missed the big opportunity. At that time, people were still sending cattle to the Osage territory in Oklahoma so Bob started doing that also. Then he decided he liked the Flint Hills of Kansas better. He then sent cattle there and again, he always missed it. The story goes on to explain that Bob continued to try work hard and kept the belief each year that the next year was going to be better.

The Johnston family built a house up North Randolph and their neighbors were the Templeton family. Photographs from that time show the family in front of the red brick house which is two blocks from where the Chicken Farm is today. The Templeton family is pictured also and the family stated that was one of Heritage Park's strongest attributes in that it chronicles how so many different families are connected. The Johnston children grew up and in 1937 they built a house on Paseo de Vaca that Katie Mertz Johnson lives in today.

The Johnston children attended San Angelo schools and Bob jr being the oldest would drop Ruth at Junior high and leave Marolyn in the dark on the front steps of Santa Rita elementary to wait for her principal Ms. Ella Jones. The family shared

how different the world was from today that a child could be safely left in that situation. They were a ranching family and there are lots of pictures of the children on horseback helping with the roundups and the shearing. Marolyn always told about being in the barn with her daddy where her job was to straighten nails and she always wanted to go on roundups especially when she was too young to go. She would hear her older brother and sister leaving and run out yelling "saddle my horse." Consequently, there is a picture of her on a horse in her pajamas. Ruth spent a lot of time in the house with her mother and she and her older brother weren't entirely convinced that Marolyn was good help but they were a very tight family and shared the work. No stories have been passed down reporting disgruntled attitudes.

Eventually Bob Sr. needed to get out from under being a farmer. He ran 10,000 sheep and a thousand head of cattle at the XQZ over the course of the 20 years and seemed to always miss the big money deals. There're photographs showing cattle being loaded onto the Santa Fe railroad at Burn, which is a stopping point near Sonora. Finally, in 1945 he said he finally hit it big and that everything came together. He made \$50,000 that year. Bob Jr. was serving in World War II in the Pacific theater. He was involved in the historic landing on Okinawa. Bob Sr. had taken the family to Colorado Springs to the Antlers Hotel many summers. There was a ranch that was for sale and it had been owned by the Hatchet cattle company, which was the Thatcher brothers who founded Pueblo. Bob Sr. accompanied some men who were looking at the Red Top ranch and when the others were not interested Bob Sr. bought it. It was land that the Goodnight Loving Trail went through. They still had the historic Goodnight barn, which the Johnston Foundation has given money to help preserve. Bob Sr. bought 46,000 acres in 1945, and when Bob Junior got out of the army, he was discharged straight to the Red Top as his father was still also running the XQZ in West Texas. The Red Top had one house that was built by a man named Gil with the area was known as the Gil pens. Many ranchers from the area would bring their cattle and used them as a communal pen.

Bob Jr. was living in this old house and it was called the Red Top because somebody had gotten red paint and painted the roof of the building red. Bob Jr. was a very dignified man and a hard worker like his father. Bob Jr. once said "I got up every morning to go see what my father had bought." And so, from the 46,000 acres which Bob Jr. sold in 1983, it had grown it to 160,000 acres, and it was considered the third largest ranch in Colorado at that time complete with dinosaur

tracks and a spring behind the house. It was in Peterson Canyon. The ranch had rolling hills and, in the winter, cattle could be put over there so they would not get lost in the canyons that had pine trees. The University of Colorado has done much archeological research on this land and in a cave over a little waterhole they found a preserved Indian. They took him out, unwrapped him, measured him and wrapped him back up and put him back in the cave. Bob would give tours and drive people all over the ranch and he would tell these great stories.

Bob Jr. went to TCU and did have a business degree, but he would've liked to have furthered his education. His father had bought the land though and instructed Bob Jr. that ranching is what he was going to do. Bob Jr. did his best and made it a great success. He ended up serving on a Thatcher brother's-controlled bank board for many years as the chairman of the board and was greatly respected. He was also a helper at the Pueblo zoo.

The family feels perseverance is a common thread that runs through their lineage and also a creative can-do spirit. Bob Sr. for many years never really had a considerable sum of money and they lived through the Depression and other trying times. He could make anything including a barbecue he built at the Paseo de Vaca residence. He came to the Mertz home place at Pie Town, New Mexico and built the same type outdoor barbecue. When they bought the Red Top, there was only one well and he ended up drilling and having 36 windmills. He had the type truck he to be able to pull them and he fixed them himself. He could also weld and built an entire shop. The house on Paseo de Vaca was built from plans that Katherine Johnston drew. She also laid out all the landscaping and drew the designs for the beautiful carved doors that grace the interior.

Bob Junior always did very well on the prairie of southeastern Colorado, but in 1956 there was a horrific snow storm in which they lost 2,000 head of cattle. They were able to save a few mother cows but had to go forward for a few years without the large numbers they had had before. He knew how to knuckle down and to make those serious decisions and follow through with them. When this lean season ended, he went to Montana and bought 2,100 head from a man named Wellington Rankin and got back into active business. His wife Doris whom he met at TCU was an integral part in all his efforts. The big joke he loved to share that was when they married that Doris didn't even know how to cook. She learned and ended up publishing a cooking book. She canned great amounts of food that came in handy when there were no cattle to sell. Bob did all the work on the ranch himself as he had so well learned to do growing up on the XQZ.

Bob Jr. died now but his investments have continued to increase. The Johnston foundation has not only done many significant things in Pueblo but also here in San Angelo. The first project the Johnston foundation gave to in San Angelo was the Stephens Central Tom Green County library and then later to the San Angelo Performing Arts Center. The foundation board views San Angelo projects as pertinent as those in Pueblo due to the fact that Bob Jr. grew up here.

All the success really goes back though to Bob Jr. being dedicated enough to do what his father asked of him in running the Red Top. It was a family corporation and observing this bond influenced Katie, Joan and Margaret Mertz about how family should work together and how business needs to be done. There were times when Bob Jr had to stand up to his father, because it was the changing of the hands. The family understood because Bob Junior needed to run the Red Top the way he saw fit.

A special photograph shows a thousand head of cattle coming over the hill at the red top and as Bob would point out there's only three cowboys with that thousand head of cattle. But low and behold, there would be the milk cow that Bob Sr. brought there. He hated milk cows but brought one anyway.

In terms of the future Joan Mertz feels that the tariffs that have been put on China have affected the soy beans that they're growing. If the government doesn't work with farmers and ranchers that there will not be the help needed to allow families to raise their children on these pieces of land that hopefully they still have from their ancestors and have not had to sell off.

The Red Top Ranch was bought just as the war ended in 1945. Great prosperity was happening at that time for many Americans. This story is a typical American dream success story. It is the hope of the family that they may continue in this same strong vein.