

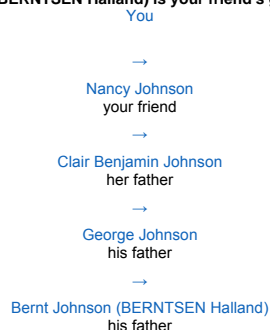
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**Bernt Johnson (BERNTSEN Halland) is your friend's great grandfather.**



## Bernt Sakarias Johnson (BERNTSEN Halland)

(1858 - 1939)

Nicknames: **"/Ben/"**  
 Birth: September 3, 1858 (80) in Lista, Halland i Heia br. 3, Norway  
 Death: March 19, 1939 in Frankfort, Benzie CO, MI  
 Immediate Family: Son of [Bernt](#) and [Anne](#)  
 Husband of [Petrine Gesine](#) and [Alvina](#)  
 Father of [Sigval Bernt \(Sig\)](#), [Serene Gustavia \(Gusta/Augusta\)](#),  
[George](#), [Bessie](#) and [Jessie Belle](#)  
 Brother of [Jørg Adolph](#), [Anna](#), [Petra](#), [Birgitte Severine](#), [Rine Tomine](#) and [2 others](#)  
 Half brother of [Sigvald](#) and [Hanne Severine](#)

Added by: [Nancy Johnson](#) on Oct 8, 2007  
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### About Bernt Sakarias Johnson (BERNTSEN Halland)

"Coming Through with Rye" life on South Manitou Island  
<http://www.manitouslandsarchives.org/archives/ebooks/ctwr/ctwr-web.pdf>.

Christening and the people who witnessed.  
 Bernt Sakarias døpt 3.10.1858 Halland  
 Faddere: 1. gbr. Anders Larsen og kone Antonette Hansdatter, 3. Martine Andersdatter af Snabbe, 4. uk. Thomas Andreassen Bjørnstad.

Bernt Sakarias <BERNTSEN>  
 Event(s):  
 Birth: 03 Sep 1858 Place: <Vanse, Vest-Agder, Norway>  
 Christening: 31 Oct 1858 Place: Vanse, Vest-Agder, Norway

Parents:  
 Father: Bernt Sakarias JONASEN  
 Mother: Anne Severine PEDERSDR

Source Information:  
 Batch Number: C425204  
 Source Dates: 1847 - 1878  
 Film or Fiche Number: 311276  
 Collection Details: Vanse; Den Norske Kirke  
 Buried in Lutheran Cemetery, Frankfort, Michigan.  
 File contributed for use in USGenWeb Archives by:  
 Harold & Linda Saffron [Lindaj50@charter.net](mailto:Lindaj50@charter.net) July 21, 2005, 4:05 pm

Cemetery: Crystal Lake Township Cemetery - East  
 Name: Gesine & Bernt S Johnson

Date Of Photograph: September 2004  
 Photo can be seen at:  
<http://www.usgwarchives.net/mi/benzie/photos/tombstones/crystallaketowns/johnson12167gph.jpg>  
 Image file size: 94.4 Kb

Gesine Johnson b. 1858 - d. 1894  
 Brent S. Johnson b. 1858 - d. 1939

Mother of Tom & Theo Thompson

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**5,000+** Blood Relatives

**5,000+** Ancestors

**302** Descendants

Bernt Sakarias Berntsen changed name to Bent S. Johnson in 1884 upon moving to America.

Bernt Sakarias Berntsen took over half the farm in 1880, but records show that it was owned by a Rasmus Kristensen shortly thereafter. In 1884, Bernt Sakarias Berntsen came to America. Records show that the family farm changed hands several times and was subdivided into lots for nurses at the Farsund Hospital. It is noted that the farmland had a beautiful view of the fjord and of Farsund.

The 1910 U.S. Census for Leelanau County, Michigan lists Bent S. Johnson, 62, as living in South Manitou Island.

BERNT S. JOHNSON

By Sandra Black

Monday, March 20, 1939, at two o'clock p.m., the silent messenger of death claimed Bernt S. Johnson, one of Frankfort's and Benzie County's loved and most respected citizens.

Mr. Johnson was born September 3, 1858 at Farsund, Norway. When a lad of fourteen years the call of the sea became too strong to resist and he ran away from home and secured work on an ocean going schooner. For many years thereafter, he sailed the seven seas. He was familiar with every port in the old world. His life was an unusually colorful one and his experiences which he loved to relate were many and thrilling. Twice he was shipwrecked on the ocean. Once off the coast of Newfoundland when the schooner loaded with corn, founded and he with the other members of the crew were adrift for nine days. Their only food during this time was some corn which they salvaged.

About 1880, Mr. Johnson came to America and settled in Chicago to continue his sailing activities on Lake Michigan. In 1885, he married Mrs. Gesine Thompson, a childhood friend from Norway and they moved to Whitehall, Michigan, and from there to South Manitou Island where his wife died a few years later and left him to rear seven small children. To this gigantic task, he gave his unflinching devotion. Six of those children are living today (1939) to mourn his passing.

Mr. Johnson continued to maintain his home on South Manitou Island for more than fifty years, but the call of the waves always sang in his heart. He loved the sea and almost his last utterance was "I am Shipwrecked on the Great Sea."

For about thirty years, he sailed the Great Lakes and in his later years when most men are getting ready to retire he fitted out a boat and carried on a splendid fishing business. In his busy life he never could find a time to quit. No man on Lake Michigan was more widely known and respected than Mr. Johnson. He was a man of sterling integrity and high purpose. A practical Christian -- one of God's good men.

Part I of a Two-Part Story: "I Remember ..."

BENTH S. JOHNSON

"A COLORFUL PERSONALITY"

by Glenn Furst

As long as I can remember, his name was Ben Johnson. Mostly just Ben. Often to others you referred to him as "Ol' Ben". I never knew his name was Benth until long after he died

Ben was born in Norway, a country that produced some of the finest sailors in the world. His classroom was the waterfront, down where the ships were moored, and sailors spun their yarns while sewing canvas that was torn during the storms on the last trip. He helped them spread the canvas or whatever else they asked of him. It was here he learned the nomenclature of a sailing vessel and how to tie the knots that were required of a sailor before they could be signed on. It was hard for him to wait until he became old enough to go to sea. "Finally, when I was fifteen years old" he said. "I ran away from home and sailed away on a clipper ship."

I, too, was fifteen years old when he told me these stories. That was my age when I began to work for "Ol' Ben."

He told so many stories of his sailing days as a young man. Not to me during working hours, but he lived alone and his house was a favorite place for men to gather in the evening and spin yarns. My ears were open to all these stories. Stories both good and bad for a young man to listen to, always told in the kitchen, a room filled with blue tobacco smoke, a spittoon on the floor, and the coffee pot on the wood burning range. Ol' Ben only made coffee once a day, in the early morning and it lasted all day. The fire went out in the stove when Ben and I went to work in the morning and when we came to the house for lunch Ol' Ben would head for that coffee pot. He would pick it up by the handle, raise it high above his head and slowly lower it to his mustached mouth and swig away. He would set it back on the stove with a satisfied "aw" and wipe his mustache with the back of his hand, I seldom drank coffee at Ol' Ben's house, you see, I needed milk and sugar in mine, and that wasn't like a sailor.

I worked three summers for Ben and each year I learned valuable lessons about life in general. He was a remarkable person. I learned that he had served a short time in the Life Saving Station with my father and I would wonder what my father would be like if he had lived. He died as age thirty-five of appendicitis.

There was no way you could be within hearing distance of Ben and not listen to what he had to say. I never asked him why he talked so loud. I just assumed it was a carryover from his sailing days when working high up in the sails of a full rigger or a clipper ship. If you did not shout every word, you could not be heard above the noises of the wind and flapping of canvas. He loved to tell about the time he fell off the yardarm of a full rigger. "Down I came first and hit the bottom boards of our overturned dingy I was lucky I fell on that dingy and didn't hit the deck or I would have been killed" he would say. "The bottom of that dingy caved in and my head and knees were all that was sticking out of the hole. They called the ship's carpenter and he had to saw me out. I wasn't hurt a dumb bit, but the captain made me go to bed for the rest of the day."

Ol' Ben had lived a lifetime when I got to know him. He had raised a family of five children.

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two boys and three girls. Sigwald, George, Gustie, Bessie and Jessie. His wife had died and was buried in the cemetery and he had married again. He was married to my great Uncle Theodore Beck's widow. Alvina. They

did not live together much of the time. He worked his fishing nets. She liked the farm life with her two sons -- Willie and Arthur. This was the arrangement when our family moved back to South Manitou in the year 1928. Ben, like all sailors, was a very superstitious person and there were certain things you just didn't do unless you wanted to invite disaster. For example, you never ever began a new venture on a Friday. To launch your boat for the first time, or begin a voyage on a Friday was one of the worst things you could do. Many vessels, he would tell me, that sailed on a long trip on Friday were never heard from again. Just disappeared from the face of the earth. You always coiled a line in the direction the sun traveled or you could look for trouble. Believe me, I had a lot to learn when I started to work for Ol' Ben.

When I first started to work for him, I asked how much money I was going to be paid. He told me \$2.00 a day. That was ok with me because I had so much to learn. The following year he asked me to work for him again. Knowing I had learned a great many things, I asked him once again how much I'd be paid. He said "You come and work a few days and I'll decide how much you are worth this year." After a few days I asked again. He told me \$2.00. Two bucks it was, or nothing. I never did get paid any more than \$2.00 a day during the three summers I worked for him. I didn't realize how valuable an education he was giving me, nor could I ever dream how well his training would serve me in my thirty-year career in the U.S. Coast Guard.

The work of lifting nets (pulling them to the surface from the bottom of the lake) was hard work, especially if they were set in 35 to 40 fathoms of water. Ol' Ben never did equip the "Swallow" with a gasoline powered lifter. We used to alternate pulling them up. You pull a net and then I'll pull the next one. I wasn't ready for this kind of work having lived at North Manitou Lighthouse for so long. It was only with sheer determination that I was able to get my net up from the bottom. Then I could move to the easier job of removing the fish and coiling the nets in a net box until it was my turn again. My legs soon became bowed from the heavy weight that was placed on them, and perhaps the lack of fresh milk and vegetables while on North Manitou was part of the cause. When the gill nets were set in shallow water the lifting of them was much easier.

In the beginning I was inclined to do everything the hard way. Ol' Ben would say "Don't work against the sea, you gotta' let the sea work for you." I didn't understand at first, but after watching Ben for awhile I caught on. We did our lifting on the bow of the "Swallow". Lake Michigan almost always has a sea running and we always headed the boat into the sea. The bow was constantly rising and falling. Ol' Ben would hold the net steady when the bow began to rise and pull in slack rapidly when the bow was falling. It was simple as duck soup. Thereafter I always hoped for a moderate sea when we were lifting nets.

The job of working for Ol' Ben was no easy job, but an interesting one and good training for a young man who was going to follow the sea. (My legs slowly straightened as I grew older).

Every person I ever knew was fascinated by the size of Ben's hands - they were huge in size - caused in part, I'm sure, from sliding down hemp ropes that had been treated with tar when he was a young man.

What a character this man was! I am humbled by the realization that I am incapable of finding the right words to describe him. He had lived a rough, tough life as a sailor but was reverent to his maker and seldom used profanity unless caught up in a sudden fit of anger. However, he used many words to replace the profane words. Like "Jugus" a favorite, and "Holkey, Pookey, Hookey" as a phrase. Ordinarily a good natured man and enjoyed a sense of humor I noticed his mood could change quickly as a result of either a good catch of fish or a disappointing one. A blind man could easily have known the

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fishing was good by hearing a loud voice (easily heard above the exhaust noises of the "Swallow's" noisy engine) singing a Norwegian sailor's song. It went something like this - "Hon Slinger. Hone Dingier, Ha Day. We sal the orga wer!": He told me that was a song Norwegian sailors sang when working high up on the yardarms of a full rigger. It helped to relieve tension and fear of falling.

I'll always be able to see Ol' Ben standing in the front door of the boat's cabin removing the fish from the nets and singing his song of happiness with fish scales on his mustache. There was a kindness about Ol' Ben too toward nature. During the three years I worked for Ben there was one sea gull that always sat on the bow stem of the boat where we lifted nets. It had only one leg. When Ben would find a small chub in the net, he would call "chickie chickie" and toss the fish to that one-legged gull.

Fish was bringing thirty-five cents a pound on the Chicago market and Ben liked to supplement that bulge he had sewed in the inner lining of his vest, but he was generous too, and often times would wrap a nice whitefish up in paper and say to me, "Here, take that home to your mother." The other mothers on the island got a fish now and then too.

For a few families on the Point (including ours) whitefish livers were a delicacy. The livers were always selected from fish taken from pound nets where the fish was alive when removed from the net. Perhaps still flopping around then it went on the cleaning board. The fish too small for shipping was sometimes given to the Coast Guard men for smoking. All families benefited from the smoked fish so there was always considerable pressure on Ben to bring in the smaller whitefish to be smoked, even though these fish were illegal. Ol' Ben loved to please folks, but he had been warned by the game warden and it made him nervous each time he did it.

One of his favorite expressions, and always said in a loud voice, "When you do right - you come out tight!" Another expression you heard frequently, most often early in the morning when he came out of the kitchen door and faced the morning sun, he would call out "This is the land of milk and honey!" It would create a smile on the face of everyone who heard him - and believe me most people on the Point heard him. Regardless of the time, or how far away a person was, he would call a "Good Morning" greeting to that person with a comment about the weather.

No one on the Point carried a watch in those days. Pocket watches were not waterproof and watches were not necessary as the man in the lookout sounded the time each thirty minutes on a ship's bell. The hour was sounded in ship's time. The bell not only informed the people of the time of day, it was comforting to realize the man that rang the bell was also watching out for house fires, little savages getting into trouble, etc.

It was only a short period of time after we arrived back on South Manitou that my step-father bought another Model T. This one was a sedan. This feature eliminated the fussing around with side curtains and stuff when it rained. "I can drive the kids to school in bad weather" Dad Hutzler said. "Glenn can have our old one." I was shocked - but tickled pink. It seems our original Model T that had been on North Manitou had been purchased with my father's insurance money and it seemed proper that I should have it. It was now nine years old and had tires on it that were part the regular size and others were balloon tires. I tried to keep balloon tires on the back

and the smaller size on the front, but not always did it turn out that way, and then the car had a cockeyed appearance. The top had become tattered from encounters with trees, so I took it off. As long as it would run it was a beautiful machine to me. The engine had developed excessive end play in the crankshaft and that caused the magneto points to separate making it necessary much of the time to jack up a back wheel in order to get it started. I learned quickly to park it on a side hill. But I loved that car and it was worth the hard work I did for Ol' Ben to buy gas for it.

Now Ben had been a man of the sea for many years and somewhere along the line he had developed a taste for alcoholic drinks, however, I never remember him having any of his own. If someone would bring a bottle of whiskey over to Ben's house, he would get out three shot glasses, one for the person who brought over the bottle and two other glasses, one for himself now, and the other one was carefully filled and placed on the cupboard shelf for tomorrow. He had good friends who did make and have it around all the time and they needed to have a fish to eat now and then. Their need for fish in their diet, seemed to me, related to how frequently Ol' Ben acquired a real bad thirst. It was not unusual for Ben to say to me during the afternoon, "Glenn, go get your car and we will take Bill up a fish to eat. Tomorrow I'll give you five gallons of gasoline." Of course I knew he meant Bill Haas, a bachelor farmer, who always had a barrel or two of hard cider in his pit. In cases of real bad thirst, he could find a bottle of "white lightning" around the house too.

It took some time for me to realize the five gallons of gasoline would never happen. However, in all fairness I must admit he did, on a couple of occasions, fill up a little red gallon can and with considerable ceremony, we would raise up the front seat of my car and pour it in the tank. It didn't matter that much to me, you see, I was enjoying the experience of feeling I was needed, and I knew I would be included in a small way in the activities. Besides, it was fun and I'd hear some fantastic stories.

Ben was never comfortable in a car, I'm sure, as he would sit perfectly straight up, with both legs shoved out I front of him and his feet were firmly planted against the floorboards. He always stuck his corn cob pipe in his mouth and held it there with his left hand while his right hand was on the car door. We would barely get under way when he, in his loud voice, would say "Now take it easy or I'll hada' throw out the arnkori!" (anchor)

Bill Haas was another island character and, in my opinion, there will never be another person quite like him. He loved fun - I never saw the man angry for any length of time and if he did get upset about something, he could always find something humorous about it. You just couldn't be angry with him - he would josh you out of it somehow. I don't think I ever heard him say a sentence that didn't have some profanity in it, or he didn't use the Lord's name in vain in some manner. He would be having fun all the time. Even the most reverent of people would excuse him by saying "He just can't help it, that's Ol' Bill."

Now for me, a young fellow who had lived rather a sheltered life at North Manitou lighthouse for nine years - a trip up to Ol' Bill's with Ol' Ben was an education by itself. My learning process was accelerated to a pace that could make a young fellow dizzy, and it did a few times, too.

I do not know how Ben got into the fishing business or where he met his first wife, or how he came to settle on the island. I do know he owned property across the road from the schoolhouse on the south end of that field. The Armstrongs had a home on the north end of that field. There was evidence of buildings on each end

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of the field when I went to school on the island. Ben's property extended through the woods southward and included the large opening commonly known as the Jim Burdick farm where Fred Burdick built the two cottages by Lake Florence. There was quite a nice home and barn in the center of that field when we returned to South Manitou in 1928. Ben had some buildings down by the bay dock too. I do know he owned all of the point except the Life Saving and Lighthouse property. He sold it piece by piece to people to build houses. He, too, had two houses built for Life Saving people to rent. At that time he was raising a family on the farm and fishing pond nets for a living. Ben had a reason to claim in his loud voice "This is the land of milk and honey!"

Ben always dressed the same. His clothes were those of a ship's officer, dark navy blue, complete with vest and necktie. He always wore a ship officer's cap without the emblems. The inside vest pocket was secured with a horse blanket safety pin. Below that pin was a large bulge. He carried a wallet, mostly for appearance. One of his favorite expressions was "I can go anywhere, in the coldest kind of weather, with just my vest and knock (sic) tie on!"

After Ben raised his family and his first wife died, he moved into one of the houses on the Point. The house that became known as Ol' Ben's house to everyone else on the island.

When I first began to work for Ben I was really not ready for all the things I had to learn in order to be of any value to him. You see, our family had just moved from North Manitou Island where I had spent most of my time taking care of a group of little kids.

I could row a skiff after a fashion, but the fine points I had not been told about, like feathering your oars when going into the wind and taking a bearing over the stern of the boat in order to hold a straight course. I had never sculled a boat in my life. I was determined to learn and I did; however, I never could do it like Ol' Ben. He would face forward and scull with one hand and hold his corn cob pipe in his mouth with the other hand. What an accomplished sailor he was. I've thought about it and I've wondered why did he have so much patience with me? Did he do it because I was the son of Martin Furst, a former shipmate of his, or because there were no other young men around who would work for two dollars a day?

It was my second summer with Ben and we were fishing two settings of gill nets and a pond net located out in front of the lighthouse. We were getting ready to lift the pond net one morning when a couple of Coast Guard men came by and asked Ben to bring in a few undersized whitefish to smoke. Generally this did not create a problem, but it seems Ben had just heard about the game warden arresting a couple of fishermen over in Leland for shipping undersized whitefish. I could see Ben was nervous while we were putting on our yellow oil skins and preparing to row and scull the pond boat out to the net. It seemed to me I couldn't do anything to suit him that morning. I later realized that he was afraid the warden would be coming over on the mail boat which was arriving at the island about the same time as we would be coming in from the pond net with those undersized fish for smoking.

When we arrived at the net, Ben kept looking out toward Glen Haven and, sure enough, the mail boat was headed for the island. Ben sculled the boat around to the proper pilings while I stood in the bow and untied all the down haulers. We then began to lift the net. We had a good catch that day with perhaps a couple hundred pounds of legal fish and we kept about twenty or thirty pounds of the smaller ones for smoking. It was these smaller ones that had him worried and he was cross as an old bear. In the process of resetting the net, Ben

thought I tied one of the down haulers improperly and he dropped his sculling oar and came forward, walking in those flopping live fish, raising his boots high to clear the middle seats and he was cussing all the time (this was unusual for Ben who seldom cussed). He said, "You dump fool, you've been working for two years and you don't know how to tie them downhaulers yet!" He pushed me aside to do it himself when he exclaimed, "By Jugus, you did tie it right!" I'd had it, I replied in my loudest voice, "You old S.O.B. - I quit - take me ashore right now!" He was in shock. His eyes and mouth popped open and he said, "Oh Jugus man you can't quit on the high seas - that's mutiny!"

I insisted he put me on the beach right there in front of the lighthouse. We were living there that summer. When I came in the house with my hip boots and yellow oil skins on smelling of fish, mother knew something had happened but she knew by looking at me that I wasn't in a mood to tell her so she kept quiet. I went upstairs in the living room and turned on our Atwater Kent radio and watched Ben scull his boat and fish around the lookout point into the bay. The mail boat was arriving at the island right then too. I noticed how the wake of it rocked Ol' Ben in the pond boat as it went by. I didn't care if the wake tipped Ben and his pond boat over, and secretly I hoped the game warden was on that boat too.

All the next day I sat by that upstairs window and listened to the radio. My family, knowing something was wrong, kept picking at me to find out what was bothering me. I told them I had quit my job and I could see the concern in my mother's eyes as she knew how badly I needed that two dollars a day to buy new clothes. I had some teeth that needed fixing too.

I sat there by the window and wondered about the mutiny thing. Was I really in a lot of trouble? I recalled some of the stories Ben had told of mutiny on the high seas. Punishment was invariably death. Was that pond net out in the lake far enough to be considered high seas?

It was a relief to me when I saw Ol' Ben swaggering up that boardwalk headed for the lighthouse. I heard him knock on the kitchen door and his greeting in a loud voice "Good Morgan, Mrs. Hootzler, a fine Morgan in the Morgan!" They visited a few minutes and it wasn't very long before I heard him say "Where's Glenn?" I heard mother answer, "Oh he's around somewhere." And then he said the thing I wanted to hear. "Tell him I'd like him to come and help me lift nets in the Morgan." I heard mother reply, "Yes, I'll tell him." He left a few minutes later. I came down the stairs with a smile on my face. Mother winked at me. All was right in my world.

I had committed mutiny on the high seas - and I had gotten away with it.

A year or so later a contractor from Wisconsin began making improvements at the Coast Guard station. He was enlarging and raising the boat house. The station itself was having a basement put under it and bathrooms were being installed. Wages were fifty cents an hour. All the island young men old enough, including myself went to work for that contractor.

Ol' Ben had to limit his activities, not only because of his age, but the boys available to help him were so young and inexperienced.





It's been sixty-four years (in 1992) since I began to work for Ol' Ben and in my mind I can see an old man, a man who had already lived a lifetime, teaching a young boy, a boy of slight stature, valuable lessons of how to secure a living from the sea. Lessons that boy will never forget.

The End

[less](#)

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 <b>Bernt Johnson (BERNTSEN Halland)</b> himself	 <b>Petrine Gesine Tomassen/Thompson Johnson (Gabrielsdtr.)</b> wife	 <b>Sigval Bernt (Sig) Johnson</b> son
 <b>Serene Gustavia (Gusta/Augusta) Nelson</b> daughter	 <b>George Johnson</b> son	 <b>Bessie Robertson</b> daughter
 <b>Jessie Belle Pickers</b> daughter	 <b>Alvina Beck Johnson</b> wife	 <b>Bernt Jonassen</b> father
 <b>Anne Jonassen</b> mother		

## Photos of Bernt Sakarias Johnson (BERNTSEN Halland)

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From the book "The North Atlantic Ocean" by G. H. S. Clouston. The book is a history of the North Atlantic Ocean, published in 1908. It covers the history of the region from the time of the Vikings to the present day. The book is a valuable source of information on the history of the North Atlantic Ocean and the people who lived there.

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