

# Texas Memoirs



George Booker (2004)

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## Part 1 – Roots

One of my great-grandmothers, Jane Booker, died in childbirth when my grandfather, Thomas Jefferson Booker, was born in 1861.

Her husband, my great-grandfather, Isaac Wise Booker, enlisted in the 43rd Mississippi Infantry and died in the Civil War, in 1862. He was 32. He left behind two small orphan sons, who were raised by their grandparents. When they were grown, they came to Texas in 1881.

My grandfather married, had six children (including my father, born in 1908), was a farmer and a railroad worker. About 1910, he lost his farm (due most likely to bad harvests), and was a sharecropper for many years afterward, working other people's land. It was during this time that he and his wife learned the Truth – probably from the traveling preacher AH Zilmer – and were baptized as Christadelphians.

Due to family financial reverses, and hard times in general, my father, Eldon Booker, had to quit school at the age of 14. He went to work picking cotton and doing other odd jobs (for about \$1 a day), all to help support his family. He never returned to school, and worked hard the rest of his life.

When World War II came, Eldon was drafted, but being a Christadelphian and conscientiously opposed to war, he asked to serve in the medical corps. (Living in west Texas far from any ecclesia, he had no guidance to avoid military service altogether; so he took the only course he thought was open to him.) After more than three years in England, he returned home – still in uniform – where he was refused fellowship at his former Christadelphian meeting. For some years he did not attend any meetings, until much later in life he once again became a member of a Christadelphian ecclesia.



On the other side of the family...

Another great-grandfather, Samuel Ealy Johnson, Sr, also fought in the Civil War. (He actually left early in 1865, like many Confederate soldiers, when the war was plainly lost, and men were eager to get back home and start in on spring planting. Being officially a “deserter”, he more or less anticipated the Christadelphian position he would later adopt.)

Sam Johnson then married Eliza Bunton, fought Indians, and helped settle the hill country of Central Texas. In the 1870s he drove herds of cattle up the Chisholm Trail to the railhead in Kansas, made a large fortune, and then lost it again when cattle prices sank.

In 1868, his wife, Eliza Johnson, hid in her cellar with her infant daughter, stuffing a diaper in the baby's mouth to keep her quiet, while Apaches ransacked her home. (I was always grateful that they survived – since there would have been no George if the Indians had found them!)

In the 1880s a travelling doctor was who also a Christadelphian preacher held a series of debates with a preacher for the Church of Christ – which Sam and Eliza and Eliza's mother attended. Shortly thereafter, they were baptized as Christadelphians.

Sam and Eliza had seven children. The youngest daughter was Jessie, my grandmother, born in 1887. She told me once that her earliest memory was of seeing a covered wagon coming over the distant hills, and her running excitedly to tell her parents that it was the angels coming to take them to the judgment. It was in just such wagons that she and her family would travel to the early fraternal gatherings and Bible schools in rural Texas, camping along the roadside for as much as a week at a time along the way.

One of Sam and Eliza's grandchildren was Lyndon B. Johnson, who grew up amongst many Christadelphians and attended Christadelphian Sunday Schools and Bible schools. Although he was never baptized as a Christadelphian, he plainly remembered much of what he had heard as a child. (One of the Christadelphian beliefs repeated endlessly in the young LBJ's hearing was: "The Jews are God's people!") As a young US Congressman in the 1930s, he worked secretly to help many hundreds – perhaps thousands – of Jews endangered by the Nazis to escape Europe. They were taken out through Spain, then sent to Mexico and Cuba, and finally they came to the US on blank visas provided (illegally) by LBJ. (This was all at a time when the official American policy was to do nothing about German and Polish Jews. Oskar Schindler wasn't the only one working, at great personal risk, to save Jews out of the Holocaust!)

As the President of the United States in 1967, when the Six Days War broke out, Lyndon Johnson stood up to Russia, sending destroyers into the eastern Mediterranean as a signal that the US would resist any Russian efforts to invade Israel.

My grandfather, Jessie Johnson Hatcher's husband, died at an early age of tuberculosis, leaving her with one child, Ruth (born in 1915). Jessie never remarried but lived with her bachelor brother, George Johnson, and took in boarders for years, to provide for herself and her daughter.

My mother graduated from Rice University in 1938, and taught school for several years in a desperately poor south Texas school at Cotulla – the same school where her first-cousin Lyndon had begun teaching a few years before. She regularly spent part of her \$100/month salary to buy food for the poor Mexican children who came to school every day hungry and barefoot.

My grandmother, Jessie Johnson Hatcher, was a lifelong Christadelphian. She was also, for some time, Lyndon Johnson's last surviving aunt, and closest family relative. When he became President in 1963, he invited her to come and live with him and his family in the White House. Jessie, always quite outspoken, said, "No, thank you. I know when Christ comes and sends his angel to bring me to him, that he can find me in my little home in Texas. But I'm not so sure my angel could find me if I were living in the White House!" She continued to live in her little home in San Saba, Texas, until she died in 1973.

In 1945 – at the end of the war – Eldon Booker returned from England. Eldon Booker and Ruth Hatcher married in December 1945, and... drum roll!!... on January 21, 1948, in San Saba, Texas, their first son was born... George Thomas Booker.

Incidentally, the Booker family were Unamended Christadelphians, and the Johnson/Hatcher family were Amended Christadelphians. So I was the child of a "mixed marriage"!



Now that is something of my story. Not that it's more interesting than anyone else's – except to me, and to my family! There are high points and low points... some achievements and some failures... and a few “skeletons” in the closet (including a rather sensational murder that seems to have been covered up, and which no one talks about to this very day – possibly for “political” reasons).

But here's the point: to some degree, every life is composed partly of the lives that went before – the experiences of parents and grandparents. Decisions made generations earlier have an impact upon our lives today. And the random (or God-directed) selection of genetic imprints, as well as family stories told and retold, passes down from one generation to the next. We are always, in some significant part, what our parents (and grandparents, and great-grandparents, and so forth) have made us.

That's the “scarlet thread”, the thread of blood that runs through our lives.

So a little exhortation: if you have never done so, do it soon! Find out something, from parents or grandparents, or aunts and uncles, about your family history, your “scarlet thread”. And find out something about your ecclesia – how it began, the problems it faced, how it grew. Find out something about the lives of the older folks in your ecclesia: where they came from, the trials they faced and overcame, how they learned the Truth.

And treasure those things. They will help you understand who YOU are! And how you are – or how you may be, one day – bound up in the “bundle of life”, by the “scarlet thread” of ancestry and memory.



## **Part 2 – John Oatman**

John Oatman was born in Kentucky on July 14, 1787, and moved first to Indiana, where he married. Later he and his family moved to Illinois, finally settling in the community of Dundee. It was in Illinois that he would meet and have discussions with Dr John Thomas about the truth of the gospel as expounded in “Elpis Israel”. Soon he became committed to the gospel of Christ, and was baptized.

The Oatman family moved to Texas in 1850, settling first in Bastrop County. John and his sons were very soon preaching the gospel to all who would listen, often holding debates with ministers who challenged their teachings. In those days, such debates were assured of large turnouts. Over the years many families in the Texas hill country learned the Truth in that way.

While some members of the Oatman family stayed in Bastrop County, most of them moved on to Llano County. Their preaching extended to many of the central Texas areas. They reported their progress to John Thomas and their letters appeared in his magazine, “The Herald of the Kingdom”.

Of the sons of John Oatman, several were committed preachers of the gospel, notably Clement Oatman – a very effective debater and teacher.

The Civil War (1861-1865) and the resulting unrest on the frontier hampered the Truth's progress. People in the Texas hill country were divided in their allegiance - leading to some violence - and the Indians took advantage of the situation by staging a number of raids. It was a dangerous time, and preaching the Truth was not very effective - in fact, a number of converts fell away. But after the war's end the brothers' efforts would resume with God's rich blessing.

Citizens of Llano, Texas, honor the memory of John Oatman and the Oatman family as early settlers of the county, but their biography of "Elder" John fails to mention anything about his teachings. It is just stated that "John Oatman, Sr, was an active minister of the gospel for 40 years, always refusing remuneration for his services." John Oatman was already of advanced years when he arrived in Texas, and he fell asleep in 1875. During his last years, he was able to witness the beginnings of the Christadelphian community in Texas.



### **Part 3 – Johnson Family Memoir**

The Johnson Family Cemetery is a beautiful site, in a green pasture, encircled by an old rock wall, overlooking the Pedernales River. Cattle graze nearby. There are about 50 graves there. It is rather wonderful to stand there now and think of the day coming, when probably 3/4 of the graves will be opened ... there are that many Christadelphians buried there!

The tombstone that is my favorite (if that's the right word!) is of Priscilla (Mrs. RH) Bunton (1821-1905); she was LBJ's great-grandmother (my great-great-grandmother, and the first Christadelphian in the family). Hers was the first grave in the cemetery. She was buried there because, when she died, the Pedernales River was overflowing its banks, and the family could not get her across to the regular community cemetery on the other side. And that is how the Johnson Family Cemetery got started, almost 100 years ago.

Her tombstone is small and simple and white; on the top it has a little lamb curled up as though asleep, and underneath it reads, "Here lies a Christadelphian, waiting for the resurrection."

Only a couple of miles down the country road from the Johnson Family Cemetery is the old Christadelphian campgrounds, used for Bible schools and camp meetings for over 100 years now. Near there is an actual "Christadelphian Cemetery", where quite a number of other Christadelphians are buried (some of my other Christadelphian relatives, on the Booker side rather than the Johnson side, are buried there).

I'm thinking that whole area will be a busy place on the Resurrection Day!

There is a Christadelphian ecclesia that meets at the Stonewall campgrounds most Sundays. It is fairly small – 15 or 20 members. There are many more Christadelphians in the cemeteries nearby than are living in the area now.



Alan Eyre, in “The Protestors”, has this paragraph, beginning the story:

“The brothers Oatman, rugged individualists both, rode the range on the Texas frontier years before the cowboys and Indians had finished scuffling, ‘travelled the length and breadth of the state’, held debates and camp meetings, and are reported to have baptized ‘a hundred men and women with their own hands’ including forbears and relatives of former President Lyndon B. Johnson.”

At least one of these Oatman brothers was a doctor; in the 1870s that area of Texas (the rugged hill country of southwest Texas) was so under-populated that it was served rather haphazardly by traveling doctors. What one did if he or she needed a doctor quickly probably doesn’t bear thinking about. (Of course, “simple” things like childbirth were handled by local midwives.)

Sam Ealy Johnson, Sr., was a Confederate war veteran, who along with his brother Tom Johnson settled the town which became Johnson City (a name that exaggerates the size of the small... 1,500 or so people... town). In the beginning of the settlement, Sam Johnson was also required by circumstances to be an Indian fighter. This territory was on the very edge of civilization, and the Indian tribes still encroached here and there. After a particular raid by Indian warriors in which some neighbors were killed, Sam and other men of the area went out hunting down the Indian party, leaving Sam’s wife and infant daughter home alone. When other hostile Indians approached the farmhouse, Eliza took her baby and hid in the cellar, pulling a rug over the trapdoor to hide their whereabouts, stifling the baby’s cries with its diaper, while the Indians ransacked the house. The very site where this happened is still to be seen today.

[As a child, I was always especially interested in this story, since Eliza was my great-grandmother, and my grandmother was (Biblically speaking) still in the loins and womb of her parents at that time. You can see how I felt it was crucial that Eliza survive the Indian attack ... inasmuch as my own existence was “on the line” too!]

The baby was my grandmother’s eldest sister, Frank (I think Sam must have wanted a boy). She survived the Indian raid to become a lifelong Christadelphian, and was very devoted to the truth. She lived into her 90s; as a small child in the 1950s I can remember attending Sunday meetings in her house – which later was bought by her nephew Lyndon and converted into what came to be called “the Texas White House” during his presidency.

Sam and Eliza, and Eliza’s mother Priscilla were converted to the truth through listening to debates between the traveling brother Oatman and the local preachers. Sam is said to have waited expectantly through several nights of discussions, wondering when the preacher was going to bring out the real “guns” and demolish this Christadelphian “heretic” ... until he finally realized that no more arguments were forthcoming. So he sought out brother Oatman and said, “Please show me what the Bible teaches.”

Sam Johnson was an extraordinary character – one of those men who tamed a frontier wilderness and made it a home; he left a mark on the land and the people that followed. He was a cattle rancher and driver, raising and buying cattle which he herded north over the cattle trails through Oklahoma and Kansas, to the railhead for shipment to St Louis and Chicago and the big eastern cities. He made a fortune, lost a fortune, and repeated the process several times in a highly volatile and risky business. In between, he was active in state

politics and campaigned for a seat in the Texas State Legislature – but apparently saw that public service as a passing duty to be discharged, not a career. (How that squared with his continued profession as a Christadelphian I am still not sure; my guess is that the Christadelphian prohibition against voting and political involvement was not so well-thought-out and absolute then ... at least on the Texas frontier ... as it became later. Not excusing, mind you, just trying to explain.)

Sam and Eliza had seven children. The five daughters were all baptized and became practicing Christadelphians, including Jessie Johnson (later Jessie Hatcher), my grandmother. One of Sam's sons, Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr., did not embrace the Truth but made politics practically a full-time career, served in the state legislature and in other public capacities: he campaigned publicly, and somewhat dangerously, against the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and was responsible for the legislative bill that restored and preserved the Alamo as a state landmark. His son, Lyndon, although doubtless influenced by early years around his Christadelphian grandparents and aunts and uncles, and attending Sunday School and other meetings, was obviously much more drawn to his father's world of politics than to the Hope of Israel. (There are some real indications, however, that certain aspects of Christadelphian teaching remained with him throughout his long political career – especially as regards the nation of Israel.)

Back to Sam Johnson, Sr.: From "The Trail Drivers of Texas" – written by a non-Christadelphian, I quote the following:

"Sam Johnson was reared a Baptist ... but later affiliated with the Christadelphians. He was a consistent and devout member of this church until his death from pneumonia, at Stonewall, Texas on February 25, 1915.

"Highly gregarious, he attended all the neighborly gatherings and met his friends with a handshake, friendly greetings and a hearty resounding laugh. He seldom returned from these gatherings without accompanying guests, and was widely known for his hospitality and kind friendliness. A man of strong courage, deep convictions and a calm philosophy which allowed no worry, he lived serenely and quietly at his pleasant country home on the bank of the Pedernales River, from 1888 to 1915, almost thirty years. Prior to that he led a very active, energetic, often hazardous, existence. He was a tall, lithe, well-built, rangy man, six feet in height, with black wavy hair and blue eyes. His snowy beard and thick mane of white hair in his last years gave him a patriarchal appearance.

"He loved to sit on the front porch of his farm home reading his Bible and the newspapers, and greeting the frequent visitors with a hearty invitation to get down and come right in for a good visit. Although he had a high temper, he was seldom seen in anger and never in his life used an oath. He had a very deep and abiding faith in the Christadelphian creed, and, when dying, fully conscious, spoke to his loved ones, assuring them of his complete readiness to meet his Maker and of his sustaining hope of eternal life. His death, as his life, was an inspiration to those who knew him."

It was at the same country home on the bank of the Pedernales that my grandmother – the youngest child of Sam and Eliza – spent her early years. She told me once that her very earliest memory, when she was probably 3 years old (in about 1890), was of seeing an old covered wagon making its way over the hill and down the road toward their house, and

running in great excitement to find her parents ... to tell them that the angel was coming to take them all away to the Judgment!

I think that little memory – told me almost offhand – speaks volumes ... of the simple faith of Sam and Eliza, and of the pervasive influence it had on their little daughter. Some 70 years later, when her nephew, Lyndon, asked his favorite “Aunt Jessie” to come and live with him and his family in the White House, my grandmother told him, “No, Lyndon, you know I love you very much, but I belong here in my little Texas home. When the angel comes for me, I want him to know where to find me, and I’m not sure he will know his way around the White House!”



#### **Part 4 – “I see the angels coming!”**

When I was quite young, my grandmother – who was quite old – told me that her first childhood memory was seeing a wagon and horses coming over the distant hill, and approaching her house. And she was running excitedly, to tell her parents that the angels were on their way to take them to the Kingdom!

I can fix the date for that – it must have been about 1890, when she was 3 or 4 years old – and I am fairly sure of the house they were living in at the time – it’s still standing, as part of the Lyndon Johnson State Park complex.

From that house it’s a very short walk to the Johnson Family Cemetery, where my grandmother, Jessie Hatcher, is buried – near her parents, her sisters, her daughter (my mother), and her son-in-law (my father).

My grandmother was born in the horse and buggy era, only a few years after marauding Indians regularly threatened the rough new settlements in the Texas hill country. During her 86 years she jetted around the world, stayed in the White House, met presidents and prime ministers, and was buried where she grew up, on the banks of the little Pedernales River.

But her earliest memory, of an eager expectation of the return of Christ, was surely the defining experience of her life. She died with the same hope she had lived with – more mature, and more knowledgeable, certainly, but the same hope nevertheless.

My grandmother’s grandmother was the first Johnson family member buried in what became the Johnson Family Cemetery, on the banks of the Pedernales. Her tombstone has stood there for almost a hundred years now, very near the much more massive stone that marks the grave of her great-grandson, Lyndon Johnson, former President of the United States. But to me, her stone is much more impressive than his: it is a simple white stone, with a little lamb on top, and it says: “Here lies a Christadelphian, awaiting the resurrection.”

I’ve traveled a few places, and met a few people in my life too. But no one, and nothing, moves me like standing at the same place where my ancestors lived and died and are buried. Most times, when I go there, there are buses and tourists and park rangers... but sometimes, if you wait a bit, then there is... no one else, no outsider. And the stillness of that beautiful

place softens and calms and nourishes me. I listen to the wind rustling the leaves of the massive trees, and gaze across the green pasture stretching gently down to the river.

And I can almost see that little barefoot girl, running up the dirt path to the small farmhouse, “Daddy, Mommy, I see the angels coming!”



## **Part 5 – Operation Texas**

Lyndon B. Johnson’s Attempt to Save Jews from the German Nazi Holocaust

By James M. Smallwood

James Smallwood has a Ph.D. in history with a political science minor from Texas Tech University. He is a professor of history at Oklahoma State University and was a history and math teacher in Greenville, Texas, back in the ‘60s. He has written books about African-American Texans during Reconstruction; African Americans in Cook County, Texas; a history of Cook County, Texas; and the New Deal in Texas; and is currently working on a book about Lyndon B. Johnson. His book *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans during Reconstruction* won the 1982 Tullis Award given by the Texas State Historical Association. Dr. Smallwood is a Tsalagi/Cherokee Indian.



Texas has a “hidden history,” and the tale of “Operation Texas” is a grand part of that story. It celebrates the God-given part of the human spirit and the willingness of some people to go to any length to help others whose lives are in danger. “Operation Texas” began a long time ago ...



Charles Marsh, a powerful Austin, Texas, newspaper tycoon, and Alice Glass, his lady and future wife, attended the Salzburg, Austria, Music Festival of 1937. Then they took a side-trip to Germany. While in the country of Kant, Mozart, Beethoven, and Goethe, they also found time to attend a mass meeting of the Nazi party and to hear a speech by Adolf Hitler, a real madman who would soon be responsible for the deaths of millions of people. Both Marsh and Glass immediately understood what a menace Hitler was to peace, to Western Civilization, and to the concept of the sanctity of human life.

Their young Texas congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson [LBJ], had arrived at a similar view in 1934, the year that he became engaged to Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Taylor, his future wife. Just one day after he met her, he gave her a gift, a book which he had inscribed: “To Bird – In the hope within these pages she may ... find reiterated here some of the principles in which she believes and which she has been taught to revere and respect.”

The book, *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization*, edited by Pierre van Paassen and James Waterman Wise, foretold the coming Nazi terror and predicted the not-too-distant Holocaust. It included such chapter titles as “Hitler Unexpurgated: Deletions [in English versions] from

Mein Kampf;" "The Revolt against Civilization;" and "The Record of Persecutions." Published five years before the Germans began the European phase of World War II, the collective work correctly predicted Hitler's attack on Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union – in the order in which they actually occurred.

Although LBJ could not stop the coming Holocaust, for he was just one man, he recognized the Nazi menace to Western Civilization. He became determined to do what he could to help the civilized world cope with insane aggression and murder.

Based on his concern for European Jews, Congressman Johnson had to vote his convictions only five days after taking office in 1937. The Omnibus Immigration Bill came before the House of Representatives on May 18. The heart of the bill could be summed up by a question: Should the United States deport or naturalize aliens, mostly Jews from Poland and Lithuania, who had entered the country illegally on fake visas? Aligning against many Republicans and the "Dixiecrats" of the South, LBJ voted with the majority. The decision was made to save the Jews, to naturalize them. Soon, another related development led to a similar question.

In March of 1938, after Hitler seized Austria, thousands of Jews from both Germany and Austria sought a safe haven, many of them wanting to come to the United States. Would America accept them? The answer was no. A significant number of Americans were anti-Semitic, including many politicians. Additionally, many people feared that more Jewish immigrants would swell the unemployment rolls, become public charges [go on welfare], and bleed away precious resources while the Great Depression raged. The American government temporarily ignored the problems of the European Jews. But some people did not close their hearts to Jewish suffering, and Lyndon Johnson was among their number.

LBJ's interest in the national and international Jewish community can be traced, in part, to his early religious upbringing. In the latter nineteenth century, his paternal grandfather, Sam Ealy Johnson, and several of Sam's relatives had become Christadelphians. In the 1820s, the physician-preacher John Thomas left the Christian Church and founded the Brethren of Christ. Thomas taught the literal exegesis [interpretation] of the Bible, with Jews and Israel having a special place because they were the "People of the Book," meaning they were the people of the Old Testament. In Christadelphian eschatology [an explanation for the end of the world], Christ's second coming was to be signaled by a return of the Jews to Palestine and the re-creation of the Jewish state of Israel. LBJ's grandfather taught him Christadelphian doctrines.

The mature LBJ remained a member of the Christian Church, but he apparently took seriously his grandfather's charge: "Take care of the Jews, God's chosen people. Consider them your friends and help them any way you can."

After Sam Ealy died in 1915, LBJ's youngest aunt, Jessie Johnson Hatcher, kept alive the Christadelphian influence in his life. According to Aunt Jessie, the Jews must return to Israel. She added that if he ever had a chance, Lyndon should help them to do so.

After he began his political career, whenever LBJ returned to Texas, he visited Aunt Jessie. She continued to stress the Biblical views of the Christadelphians. Even during his presidential years, he and Lady Bird opened their ranch to Jessie and her fellow believers.

They came every summer for a retreat during which Jessie hammered home messages such as, "If Israel is destroyed, that day the world will end."

Given Johnson's early religious teachings, when Charles Marsh and Alice Glass contacted him about a matter involving Jews, the young congressman was more than willing to listen. Moreover, newspaperman Marsh had already helped Johnson greatly by favoring him with good publicity during his victorious congressional campaign of 1937. The young man was most willing, even anxious, to please his benefactor. Marsh and Glass explained how they provided financial resources to Jewish refugees who were escaping Germany. They had befriended the brilliant twenty-five-year-old Jewish musician Erich Leinsdorf, a German from Austria, whom they had met at the Salzburg Festival after he had conducted a beautiful symphony. In 1938 he came to the United States on a temporary visa and performed with the New York City Metropolitan Opera. Many times he visited Marsh and Glass at the tycoon's palatial countryside farm in Virginia.

Leinsdorf was still in the United States when the German Nazis rolled over Austria. He had no desire to return home where he would surely encounter discrimination and possibly be murdered by the Nazis. Although he applied to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service to extend his visa to stay longer in America, eight days before his visa was to expire, he still had not received news from the Immigration Service. When Leinsdorf told Charles and Alice about his problem, Glass asked Marsh to contact their congressman, young LBJ, and ask him for help.

On a Sunday morning, Marsh drove Leinsdorf to Washington's Mayflower Hotel, where the newspaperman kept a suite. Johnson met them there, heard Leinsdorf's tale, and the next day started solving the problem. "Operation Texas" had begun.

Johnson learned that Immigration had rejected the Austrian's application to extend his visa because he had asked for a two-year extension, something not possible under existing American law. But, due to an oversight, Immigration personnel had not notified Leinsdorf of their decision. Johnson used that miscue as ammunition for strongly pressuring Immigration to extend the visa, a demand that Immigration met by giving Leinsdorf a six-month extension.

Then "Operation Texas" started in earnest. LBJ first worked on having the Austrian's classification changed to "permanent resident," a possibility only if the musician went abroad and returned as a regular immigrant from a country whose quota of Austrians had not been reached. After contacting the United States Consul in Havana, Cuba, to make sure that the consul's quota of Austrians had available slots, Johnson put together the necessary documents and arranged for Leinsdorf to go to Cuba.

Saying that young LBJ's plan "went like clockwork," the conductor soon returned to the United States as a permanent resident. He continued his career in music and became famous for the performance of his craft. Leinsdorf had many successes and eventually became Director of the Boston Symphony Society.

Leinsdorf never forgot Johnson; through the years he contributed to all of LBJ's political campaigns. At a party given by the Johnsons in Georgetown in 1960, Leinsdorf told a bit of the story about his rescue as plotted by LBJ, a rescue that involved a stopover in Havana that Johnson had arranged. Because the rescue included acts that were illegal, secrecy needed to

be maintained. After Leinsdorf's remarks, LBJ giped: "Now, Erich, this is a lovely story, and I certainly would like to hear it again, but let me ask you something: what town shall we now put in that story to replace Havana?"

Meanwhile, Erich's rescue was only the beginning of "Operation Texas." Even as Johnson was plotting to save Leinsdorf, Jim Novy, a wealthy leader of Austin's Jewish community and a friend of the young congressman, laid plans for a trip to Palestine to celebrate his son's bar mitzvah. Before going to Palestine, the two had planned to visit Poland and Germany to spend time with relatives whom Jim Novy had not seen in twenty-five years. As the Novys readied for their trip, the first German-Czechoslovakian crisis occurred, and Nazi anti-Semitism was on the march.

LBJ learned of their trip and urged Jim to "get as many Jewish people as possible out of both countries," while predicting that "very difficult" times were about to befall European Jews. In fact, Johnson told Novy more. LBJ said, "They're all going to be killed." The Novy family had known LBJ since 1931, when he was working in Washington, D.C., as congressional secretary to Texas Congressman Richard Kleberg. During that time, Johnson and Jim Novy had become personal friends. Thus, when LBJ expressed alarm about the fate of the Jews, Novy knew that he should listen, learn, and cooperate.

Leaving for Europe in July of 1938, Novy became a key partner in "Operation Texas." The Austin businessman had Congressman Johnson's letter of introduction to the diplomats in the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, Poland, and also had a large stack of signed and countersigned immigration papers to use when needed.

Upon reaching the embassy, Novy learned that Johnson had called and asked for the consul's full cooperation in immediately processing preapproved visas.

Forty-two Jews from Poland and Germany, including four of Novy's relatives, received the documents, fled Europe, and lived, while millions were about to die.

Novy and his son learned of potential trouble when they reached Paris, where they had stopped temporarily before continuing on to Palestine. Because the second German-Czech crisis was in the wind, LBJ frantically telephoned here, there, and everywhere until he found the Novys in Paris. He demanded that they return to the United States immediately. They never got to Palestine, but they could rejoice, for – with LBJ's help – they had saved the lives of forty-two people.

By 1939 Johnson became more and more distressed. Although it was not common knowledge that the Nazis intended to exterminate Jews – at least six to seven million of them – Johnson believed that it was only a matter of time before the Holocaust would begin, as indeed it did in 1942. Furthermore, he knew of the international rejection of Jewish refugee ships, including rejection by the United States. He knew of England's policy of thwarting Jewish migration to Palestine. Unwilling to stand by idly while Nazi henchmen murdered the "People of the Book," Johnson met with Jewish leaders and said simply, "We [must] do something to get Jews out of Europe."

Straightaway, the congressman enlarged the scope of "Operation Texas." Using methods sometimes legal, sometimes illegal, and cash supplied by men like Jim Novy, Johnson smuggled hundreds of Jews into Texas, using Galveston as the entry port. Enough money

could buy false passports and fake visas in Cuba, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. After getting to such places, Jews would then make Galveston Island their only port of call.

Johnson, in Texas on an inspection tour with other officials in 1936, was state director of the Texas National Youth Administration. Johnson smuggled boatloads and planeloads of Jews into Texas. He hid them in the Texas National Youth Administration, a task made easier because LBJ's longtime friend Jesse Kellum was the Texas State Director of the NYA. Although it was illegal to harbor and train non-citizens in the NYA programs, the refugees were nevertheless temporarily housed in various sites scattered around the Lone Star State.

Novy bankrolled the effort, reimbursing the NYA for all expenses, including room and board. He also covered the cost of classes for those who did not speak English and classes to retrain the Jews so that they could meld into American life. Johnson funneled many men into NYA welding schools because welders were in high demand both during the war-preparedness campaign of 1940-1941 and during the war itself. Johnson saved at least four or five hundred Jews, possibly more.

"Operation Texas" also included aid to Jews who were "underground fighters" in Palestine. In March of 1942, Novy hosted a World War II bond drive party for thirty or so influential Texans and invited Johnson to make remarks. After they raised their quota for the bond drive and put that money away, Johnson rose, gave his listeners some "straight talk" about the European and Middle Eastern situations, and then raised yet more cash – the new money earmarked for the Palestine Jewish "underground."

"Operation Texas" continued even after the United States entered World War II. Novy later reported that in 1942 Johnson sent him on a highly secret mission to Europe. The Jewish businessman said that the job was dangerous, so dangerous that he did not tell his family, not even his wife and children. A brave man, Novy did his secret work knowing that at any time he might be caught, identified, and shot by Nazi henchmen. Soon after his return home, the Austin Jew, a civilian, received a Purple Heart Medal, an award normally given only to military men for being wounded or injured in combat.

In 1958 Novy alluded to his 1942 mission in a conversation with a reporter but refused to answer any specific questions, saying, "Only when Senator Johnson says so, will I tell the story." Novy never told. He took the secrets of his 1942 mission with him to his grave. Johnson never uttered a word about Novy's special trip or the reasons for it.

At the end of World War II, LBJ had the sad opportunity to see what he had fought against when he took on the Nazis with "Operation Texas." With other congressional leaders, he flew to Europe, inspected the overall conditions, and on June 4, 1945, visited the Dachau concentration camp. After passing through the camp's black iron gate with a banner overhead reading "Arbeit Macht Frei" ["Work brings freedom"], Johnson was stunned by what he saw. He experienced death up close as he smelled the stench. Some people in Johnson's party cried. One of the congressmen with Johnson was Louisiana's F. Edward Hebert. He summed up the feelings of all observers:

"God, how can men do to other men what these beasts have done ... [The Nazis have] destroyed the last vestige of decency in the human being ... [Young boys are] emaciated,

puny, weak, devastated, some beyond any hope of redemption ... Death is their only salvation, and they are still dying at the rate of 40 a day.”

LBJ agreed with Hebert’s views. Lady Bird later recalled that when her husband returned home, he was still shaken, stunned, terrorized, and “bursting with an overpowering revulsion and incredulous horror at what he had seen.”

The horrors of Dachau and other killing camps that Johnson inspected may go far in helping to explain his later foreign policy as president. To LBJ, Dachau meant “never again.” Never again should unarmed, pacific people be murdered by madmen.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, Johnson saw the United States as the defender of the free world, the defender that could not let Dachau happen again, be it a plan hatched by fascists or communists, by the political right or the political left. Such views may help explain why Johnson insisted on “saving” South Vietnam. He cast the Vietnamese struggle as one that could produce another Dachau. He feared that millions more unarmed civilians would be butchered by a powerful, hate-filled foe. Perhaps he wanted another “Operation Texas,” a chance to save lives by opposing what he saw as the aggression of North Vietnam.

“Operation Texas” was a most secret affair. Over time, various LBJ aides, friends, and other associates denied that such a plot ever existed. And, certainly, there is no mountain of evidence that divulges all of the specifics of the scheme. But Jewish leader Jim Novy finally made the story public during the December 30, 1963, dedication of Austin’s newest synagogue, Agudas Achim.

Invited to the ceremonies by Novy, President Johnson and Lady Bird were in attendance, with LBJ scheduled to make appropriate remarks. Knowing that the new president was well beyond prosecution for his illegal acts of long ago, Novy told the story to four hundred synagogue members and their guests, along with Austin’s civic leaders and local newspaper, radio, and television personnel. However, he did not discuss his secret 1942 mission to Europe, the details of which the contemporary public and later historians would never know. Novy’s presentation, humorous at times, drew much laughter from the crowd, beginning with Novy’s order to President Johnson: “If I get mixed up, you help me out!” Even Lady Bird had to cover her mouth and try to stifle her laughter, while the president only smiled and nodded that he would do what Novy ordered.

After Austin’s Jewish leader finished his tale, he introduced LBJ by looking over to him and, trying to hold back tears, saying with a broken voice, “We can’t ever thank him enough for all those Jews he got out of Germany during the days of Hitler.” Then, pointing to the first row where four small boys were sitting, Novy added: “There’s the ... current generation, and they’ll be watching [out] for you and helping you [while you are president].”

Walking to the podium and looming over it like the true colossus that he was, LBJ gave a brief speech that lasted about twelve minutes. For the first time publicly, he “owned up” to “Operation Texas.” He wanted to celebrate human life, to acknowledge Jewish support, and to demonstrate that long before his presidency, he became intimately involved in the Jewish community. Humanism shone through in the remarks of both Novy and Johnson. At the end of the ceremonies, the crowd of four hundred or so people virtually mobbed Novy, LBJ, and Lady Bird. Lady Bird later remembered that “person after person plucked at my sleeve and said, ‘I wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for him. He helped get me out.’”



Today, Lyndon Johnson is still reviled by many laymen and historians. He has been stereotyped as a crude, ignorant Texan who had few serious beliefs, who was an opportunist only out for personal political gain. “Operation Texas” belies that image. The “hidden history” of Texas reveals that Johnson saved hundreds of Jews from the Holocaust and did so because he cared for the “People of the Book” and because he revered human life. While he agonized over the loss of life during the Vietnam War, a war that he tried repeatedly to end with secret negotiations, he remained consistent in his attempts to help others.

Because of his domestic policies, he became known as the “Education President” and the “Civil Rights President.” In his humanism, Johnson proved to be consistent whether the target of scorn was the Jews, blacks, Hispanics, or other minorities. He tried to help them all. “Operation Texas” is a case in point.

### **Suggested Resources:**

- Oral Histories, LBJ Library: Donald C. Cook, Willard Deason, Jesse Hatcher, F. Edward Hebert, Erich Leinsdorf, and Frank Oltorf.
- Personal Papers, LBJ Library: LBJ Papers, Jim Novy Papers
- State Papers, LBJ Library: LBJ Pre-presidential Papers, LBJ Administrative Papers, LBJ House of Representatives Papers, LBJ Senate Papers and sundry other LBJ Collections
- Recordings, LBJ Library: “Dedication Congregation Agudas Achim,” Austin, Texas, December 30, 1963 [remarks of Jim Novy and LBJ].

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#### **Articles in Journals and Magazines:**

- Banta, Joseph O. "President Lyndon B. Johnson." *The Christadelphian* (January 1964).
- Kirk, H. David. "Pierre van Paassen: Righteous Journalist." *Midstream* (May 1991).

#### **Dissertation:**

- Gomolak, Louis S. "Prologue: LBJ's Foreign-Affairs Background, 1908-1948." Ph.D. diss, University of Texas at Austin, 1989.



## **Part 6 – How to pray and sing**

I grew up in an ecclesia where all the brothers – but not the sisters – knelt for all the prayers (the sisters remained seated). This practice was facilitated by everyone sitting in a large circle around the edges of the meeting room. In the center of the room there was an old wood-burning stove, which radiated heat out to the whole room, and thus also governed the seating arrangement. The four corners of the room, created by this circle within a square, were reserved for the small children – where they could play quietly and amuse themselves without disturbing the adults.

Any way, this procedure (of all the brothers kneeling) was followed – I think, universally – until a new ecclesial hall was built, right next door to the old house (which became the Sunday School building). And the new hall would have benches in rows. But Brother Sammy, by now rather elderly, continued to kneel for prayers: he would be sure to sit next to the aisle, and this would permit him to kneel in the aisle, while his wife remained seated. As I

recall (I was about 8 or 10 by this time) most of the brothers followed suit, and thus seats on the aisles were reserved for brothers. When Brother Sammy died, some continued to kneel, but gradually the practice died out as others came along who brought with them or adopted the new practice of standing for prayers.

Finally, this resolved itself into everyone (women and children too) standing for all prayers – except those for the bread and the wine, where only the baptized members who would partake of the emblems would stand, and remain standing until the bread and wine reached them. (I’m sure this helped the serving brothers identify who had and who had not received the bread and wine.)

Also, by the time we moved into the ecclesial hall, we had a rotation of presiding and exhorting brothers ... although, as I recall, Brother Sammy might insist on having his say too even when it wasn’t his turn: “Just a few words, Brother!”

Brother Sammy’s favorite hymn was “Brethren, let us walk together.” I think now that he firmly believed that, so long as we could sing that hymn, there would be no real problems. And in his last years, he expected that hymn should be sung every Sunday. I can remember occasions when the meeting would be over, and folks would be outside in the parking lot, talking or even getting ready to leave, and the call would go out, “Brother Sammy says come back in!” And we would all march back in to sing “Brethren, let us walk together” before being (properly) dismissed by Brother Sammy.



## **Part 7 – Cousin Oreole**

I grew up visiting “Cousin Oreole” [Sister Oreole Keele Bailey] – she was my cousin as well as Lyndon Johnson’s cousin. By the time I was old enough to drive, and responsible enough, my grandmother – Sister Jessie Hatcher – drafted me to chauffeur her here and there around Texas, going to all sorts of Christadelphian gatherings, and visiting with her relatives, of which “Cousin Oreole” was a favorite. (When I was off at college several years later, my younger brother Wesley was my “replacement”, and he drove Grandma everywhere.)

I never thought of “Cousin Oreole” as shy – as one press story suggested. She was, like a number of my relatives (LBJ included), loud and outspoken and opinionated and strong-willed. She wore red dresses and bright red lipstick, and when I was a kid she insisted on kissing me (full on the lips, if I couldn’t avoid it!): “Come here, George,” she’d call. “Kiss my quick! Nothing makes me sick!” I cringed a bit then, but I know now that she really did love me.

She was a wild driver, down the country roads near her house, and up to the Christadelphian campgrounds where so many meetings were held. There was a narrow entrance to the campgrounds, with a cattle guard. I can remember the occasions, at the gathering, when a dust cloud would appear on the horizon, and then the warning cry would go up, “Here comes Sister Oreole!” Which was the signal for all the mothers to grab their small children and head for safety. She’d sail through the turn at the cattle guard in her big car (they say she wrecked at least one car on that narrow entrance), and screech to a halt in a cloud of dust near the outdoor “tabernacle”. Just in time for a few kisses, and then “meeting” would start.

After Lyndon became President, “Cousin Oreole” and “Aunt Jessie” (my grandmother) were pretty much the only remaining presidential relatives from his parents’ generation, and a number of stories were written in the national news magazines and newspapers about the strange Christadelphian relatives of LBJ – who loved him but would never vote for him. “The only person I’ll ever vote for is Jesus Christ,” my grandmother would tell the reporters.

I can remember when Oreole died, my mother and I went by her house afterward, to find – how sad – that her old family Bible and a lot of old Christadelphian books had been thrown out in the trash by some uncaring relatives. We rescued some of them, and the family Bible – cleaned up considerably – rests on a table in our front room to this day. It chronicles several generations of old-time Christadelphians who were born, lived and died near the little Pedernales River that runs right by the LBJ Ranch and the Christadelphian campground and the Johnson family cemetery.

Oreole is buried there, awaiting the resurrection, right alongside Sam Ealy and Eliza Bunton Johnson (LBJ’s grandparents, and the first Christadelphians in the area), Jessie Hatcher (their daughter, my grandmother), and my parents. They are all there, a few eccentrics, a few criminals, a President of the United States, and quite a number of Christadelphians. Scoundrels and sinners and statesmen, and saints.

It’s a beautiful and quiet place now, kept up by the National Parks service. Tour buses stop by every hour or so, but only for a moment, to gaze at the grave of Lyndon Johnson. And then they’re off to the LBJ “White House” down the road. Very few tourists pay any attention to the other graves there.

So many Christadelphians in one place, and all quiet and sleeping. One day, when the resurrection comes, it may be a very lively place again. I’m thinking there may be lots of kisses, and hugs, and stories exchanged. And Oreole will be right in the middle of it.



## **Part 8 – Oreole and the Johnson family**

Brother Joe Banta writes:

Thanks for excerpts from the LBJ article re Christadelphian connections. Cousin Oreole insisted that relatives address her that way, as I learned when I married my wife Marie (Forsythe), my father-in-law being one of Oreole’s cousins. Cousin Oreole doted on all her relatives and kept in touch with many of them. Marie and I visited her many times, but my memories of her go back to my childhood. In the summer of 1939 my sister and I were invited to spend a couple of weeks with Sister [Frank] Martin while our baby sister was being born. We often wandered down the road along the river and would stop by the Bailey house – Oreole usually treated us to home-baked sugar cookies. We were frequent visitors at Sister Martin’s – she lived in what would later be the “Texas White House.” It belonged to her and her late husband, Judge Martin. It would be acquired by President Johnson much later – he also eventually acquired the Bailey place and other surrounding acreage. He replaced Cousin Oreole’s house with a more modern one which was to be a guest house after her death.

A little history: Oreole Bailey was the only child of a Brother Fannin Keele and his wife, Sister Kate (Bunton) Keele – both were highly esteemed in the Texas brotherhood of their time. It was through Sister Kate that Oreole was related to the Johnson family. Her paternal grandparents, Brother Maston and Sister Rachel (Hoover) Keele, were among the earliest converts to the truth as preached by the Brothers Oatman (who had been acquainted with Dr. Thomas in Illinois before coming to Texas in about 1850).

We were frequent visitors to the home of Sister Frank Martin. She was an aunt of President Johnson and a truly unique and wonderful lady, as well as a stalwart sister in Christ. Her husband (who died in the early 1930s) had been a well-known judge in Austin, the capital city. Sister Martin had decided at some point that their social life in Austin was not conducive to life in the Truth; so she began to spend most of her time at the ranch. Brother Martin was a reader, so his wife included a few books when she packed his suitcase for his trips. “Christendom Astray” and other such works were slipped in. He read them and became himself a convert to the Truth. I don’t know whether he gave up the bench for the Truth or whether he was retiring at the time, but he did spend the last years of his life as a Christadelphian. Sister Martin was, as I remember her in her later years, a marvelous character, dedicated to the Truth, extremely well-read and intelligent but with a remarkable sense of humor. She mixed in perfectly with all age groups. We truly enjoyed her company to the end. She lived a long time, but not long enough, we regret, to be known by the present generation. They will have to wait for the Kingdom to enjoy her company – and that of so many others, of course.



## **Part 9 – Cousin Oreole and Aunt Jessie**

A friend writes, “It was your grandmother, known to me as ‘Aunt Jessie’ ... who was quoted when having been asked about LBJ’s prayers.. (or in some context or other), as saying, ‘Lyndon’s prayers don’t get any higher than the ceiling.’ “

Yes, my grandma, “Aunt Jessie”, would qualify as a memorable character – as would Oreole. Being with the two of them, both outspoken and hard of hearing, while they carried on a conversation, was a memorable experience. (And some people say I can “talk”!)

Aunt Jessie could well have said exactly that about LBJ. I do know that, when Lyndon was inaugurated in 1965, after winning the election of 1964, she was invited to the White House for all the festivities – which she attended. At the same time, Lyndon and Lady Bird asked her if she would live with them in the White House. (She was at that time the only surviving uncle or aunt of Lyndon, and he was always fond of her – for various reasons: he had lived with her for a while after college, while he was teaching in Houston; she had given him the money to buy his first car ... he was poor then! ... and, I think especially, because she had no fear of him, no need to impress him, or win his favor, and she spoke her mind with a sort of bluntness that bordered on brutality ... of course, she would have said that she was speaking the truth of the Bible, and often she was.)

Anyway, when invited to come and live in the White House during Lyndon’s full term in office, she said, “No! I don’t know how long it will be before Christ comes, but I don’t want

the angel coming to find me in the White House. I want to be in my own little home in San Saba, Texas, near Ruth and Eldon and the boys.”

Whenever I think of that, I am reminded of Moses, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb 11:25,26). But Lyndon called her often, and they talked about world affairs; she was always reprimanding him: “You support Israel; they’re God’s people.”



The Baines, Lyndon’s mother’s family, were all Baptists, and Texas “aristocracy”. The Johnsons were, by contrast, Hill Country ranchers and distinctly lower on the “pecking order”. It was often felt in her family that Rebekah married “beneath herself”. The Baines were Baptist ministers; one was president of Baylor University; an earlier one was – if I’m not mistaken – a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence. And the Johnsons ... well, they made too much noise, drove their carriages too fast, had no educations to speak of, herded cattle, and – many of them – belonged to a strange, out-of-the-way sect or cult called Christadelphians.

I am told that – as Vice President under John F. Kennedy – Lyndon chafed at his treatment; he was treated by the inside folks in the Kennedy cabinet as “Uncle Cornpone” ... he had a Texas drawl, and he had attended Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos, while the Kennedys went to Harvard. He remarked, rather bitterly, to friends that he – LBJ – was descended from a long line of ministers, preachers, college presidents, state legislators, and war heroes ... while JFK was the grandson of a bartender, and the son of a thief. Oh well, we can choose our friends, but we can’t choose our relatives.

Oh, almost forgot. I was talking about the outspokenness of the Johnsons, particularly Aunt Jessie and Cousin Oreole. An Oreole story: asked one day by a non-Christadelphian what the Bible teaches, she pointed to a door: “You see that door there? The Bible teaches that, if you don’t repent and get baptized, when you die you’ll be as dead as that door! And you’ll have no more hope.”

Grandma Jessie had the same winning way with words. I was present, as a child at a family gathering, when one of her cousins said, “You know, Jessie, I was baptized as a Christadelphian.” Which had been true, years before. “Well, I can tell you one thing,” Jessie said, “you’re not one now!”

I’m not telling these stories to commend such forthrightness of speech – surely there were better ways to answer such questions and comments – but rather to tell it like it was. But that was Aunt Jessie, and Cousin Oreole, and – I’m told – Aunt Frank Martin (Jessie’s oldest sister) too: absolute honesty, and plainness of speech. Maybe it came from the hardscrabble existence of the early Hill Country, and the harsh realities of the Great Depression. There were some strong and tough men and women in those times; they had to be. And it’s worth pointing out that, whatever faults they had, they held firm to the Truth, and were afraid of no man and no man’s opinions.

There’s probably a lesson in there somewhere.



## Part 10 – Oscar Banta

“TB” writes:

In April 1937, brother Oscar Joseph Banta suffered a fatal heart attack during a public debate with an evangelist from the Church of Christ. His nine-year-old son Joseph would later grow up to become brother Joe Banta and his six-year-old daughter Jaxene is now sister Jaxene Burkett – my grandmother.

This newspaper article reported his death:

### RELIGIOUS DEBATER DIES AS HE WISHED – DEFENDING FAITH

O.J. Banta, 34-year-old stillman at an oil refinery, died Thursday night as he wanted to die – while defending the doctrines of the Christadelphian Ecclesia, of which there are only 24 members in Houston.

During a debate with Evangelist John O’Dowd at the Oddfellows Hall, 420 Drennan, Banta fell dead while O’Dowd was speaking. O’Dowd accompanied him in an ambulance to St. Joseph’s Infirmary, but the man had died instantly.

Justice Tom Maes returned an inquest verdict of death from a heart attack.

Banta’s death ended a friendly argument of long standing between the two churchmen. In fact, they had debated once before on another question.

Banta, who was an arranging brother for the Christadelphian Ecclesia, was taking notes when stricken.

The last legible thing he wrote was “Divine Creed – creed – I believe.”

His wife and son, Joe, 9, were in the audience when Banta died.

Mr. Banta lived at 7138 Avenue E and is survived by his wife, a son and daughter, Joe and Jaxene, 6, and his sister, Mrs. H. R. Johnson. He worked at the Shell Refinery.

The funeral will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday at Boulevard Funeral Home, with burial in Forest Park Cemetery.

*(The Houston Chronicle, April 1937)*



A week after my great-grandfather’s death, a touching letter was found in one of his coat pockets addressed to his beloved wife, sister Billie Banta.

The envelope read:

March 1937

BILLIE,

DO NOT OPEN TILL I AM "GONE."

In other words, don't open as long as I live.

OSCAR



The letter

Beloved: I believe I will go before you into the "land of forgetfulness", therefore I wish to speak "though absent."

Make your "calling and election sure" and meet me in the "Kingdom of God and of Christ" (if so be I attain to such). Lay aside "every weight that besets, and run with patience the race" without grieving for me.

Beloved, you must read more. Read the writings of Dr. Thomas, and Brother R. Roberts daily along with the Holy Oracles. Be patient in all things and give yourself wholly to the TRUTH.

Remember one thing too, "pray without ceasing." Never let a day pass without making your troubles and wishes known to God several times; for He careth for you.

Let the world speak foolish things, but you "guard your tongue" speaking only after you have weighed your words to see how they are going to sound. "Be slow to speak, instant in prayer." Take all your troubles to Him in prayer, and not to the arm of flesh.

Be patient in tribulation, knowing that it is sent for your good later. When trouble comes bear it alone. Cease from WRATH. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Remain pure in doctrine, reading after the writers mentioned above. Be sure to pour over ... Elpis Israel – Ways of Providence – Visible Hand of God – Seasons of Comfort, etc.

Engage in no silly talks, and above all, refrain from speaking evil of any who bear the name of Christ no matter how they behave. Speak to them alone, and give them good things to read. BE KIND. PRAY FOR HELP.

Before making any decisions on matters of Spirit, or temporal matters, pray fervently for guidance. Follow the Scriptures. Let no human ties influence you, no matter how much you suffer for it.

Instill "fear" into your children, and all children you speak to, for "The fear of the Lord is the BEGINNING of wisdom." Do not think you are being cruel for "in all things consider the end thereof."

Read the writings of Paul, Peter, James and the Acts over and over all your remaining time. Pray for purity, and when you have asked, seek in the Bible. You will obtain help if you help yourself.

Troubles and calamities will increase more and more as the end nears. Brethren will become weaker and cooler. This is foretold, but, Beloved, examine yourself and live for Him who died for you. Pray Always.

“Sow in Tears” for you will, after many days, “Reap in Joy” and will obtain joy and gladness “for sorrow and sighing shall flee away” when we are reunited in one family, through God’s mercy, in the Kingdom.

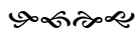
REMEMBER THE BIG FOUR: READ, PRAY, MEDITATE, PATIENCE.

MEET ME, BELOVED.

OSCAR



In my mind I travel back 60 years and see brother Oscar, with a heavy heart, lovingly writing these last words of love and encouragement to his beloved wife. Then I picture a time after his death, when his letter sat in his coat pocket in a dark little closet in a house full of grief – waiting to be opened and read. I wonder what he would think if he knew his letter has found its way into the hands of his great-granddaughter. Would he have believed it possible that his caring act of love would have touched sisters around the world in these latter days? None of us ever know how far our simple acts of love will be spread.



After my baptism, my dear grandmother gave me copies of the newspaper clipping and my great-grandfather’s loving letter. These heirlooms are precious reminders to me of how God often works through families from generation to generation. I am reminded how blessed I am that God has, in His mercy, called me into His family through Christ.

2 Tim. 1:5: “I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy Grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also.”

Gen 18:19: “For I know him [Abraham], that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment...”

I have read, reread and hopefully absorbed great-grandfather’s words of encouragement to hold fast to the Truth. I pray that you too, my dear sisters, will be encouraged by this tender letter.

Even though we sow in tears now, we will reap in joy everlasting, if we faint not. It is my prayer that all generations of God’s family by His mercy will soon be united forever as one in the Kingdom.

(TB)



## Part 11 – Marie Banta

I was a young fellow about to go off to college in 1966, when I first remember meeting Joe and Marie Banta. (I had probably seen them here or there in earlier years, but being a kid I hadn't noticed – they were, after all, “old folks” in their 30s!) I had just finished high school, and was bound for the University of Texas – a lonely small-town boy in the “big city” of Austin. I was a member, recently baptized, of a Berean Christadelphian ecclesia meeting in Lampasas, and there were no Bereans in Austin – so I didn't expect that I'd be seeing any other Christadelphians in Austin (we Bereans, of course, had to be careful with whom we associated!).

But Joe and Marie extended an invitation to me, to come to their mid-week Bible class when I was in school in Austin, and – lots of Wednesday nights – I did. Sometimes I got free rides (before I got my own car), and sometimes there were free meals (always of interest to poor college students), and always there was stimulating Bible study and discussion.

And, finally, after a few years of meeting with the Central brethren for mid-week Bible class, and going back to Lampasas for Sunday meetings with the Bereans – also, having gotten married during the interim – I (now we) came to the conclusion that there was nothing that should keep us separated from the Central brothers and sisters. So Barbara and I joined the Austin ecclesia. Joe and Marie were both a big support during that period of transition, and then there were new college students who needed rides to meeting, and meals, and Bible study.

I remember Marie as a keen Bible student, always diligently marking her Bible. From her, I learned the technique of using “liquid paper” or “white-out” to turn a “mistake” into a new marginal note! I did that for years, until my “Bible of choice” became the laptop, and the way of “correcting” a note was to use the delete button.

Classes with Marie present were always exciting, and thought-provoking. Sometimes we disagreed on a point of interpretation (and then the class was even more exciting, and thought-provoking), but I think we all learned from the process. And we still loved God, and the teachings of the Bible, and one another.

One of Marie's favorite topics (in fact, it may be the first time I ever heard the term used properly) was the “new creation”. I was excited by the New Testament teaching that God's “creation” is, in effect, an ongoing, never-to-be-finished work ... until the return of Christ and the millennium. “Be patient with me,” as the saying goes, “God hasn't finished with me yet!”

It is greatly comforting to see – and remember! – that this present age, with all its attendant pains and illnesses and sorrows, is not an “end” in itself. It is really nothing more than a vast laboratory, or “construction site” – and that God's “experiment”, or “building project”, is a work in progress, with every one of us. To remember that simple fact is a big step toward learning patience, I think: patience with one another, patience with events and circumstances we can't control, and even ... patience with ourselves.

God's work with Marie won't be finished until she is raised up to receive a young and strong body, free of all the pain that filled her later years. I look forward to that time, and expect that – among other things – we'll go right back to discussing the Word of God which she loved so well ... having become, forever, a part of God's "new creation".



## **Part 12 – Other details**

Brother Joe Banta writes:

When LBJ became President I wrote an article for the Christadelphian magazine with a brief history of Christadelphians in Texas and in particular the Christadelphian connection of the Johnson family – including the story of their conversion and the fact that Sister Bunton's tombstone still witnesses to her faith: "Here lies a Christadelphian, waiting for the resurrection."

Oreole Bailey's mother was Kate Bunton – she married Fannin Keele. So that was another Christadelphian connection with the Johnsons. You know Marie's grandmother was Talitha Keele Forsythe. Marie's grandparents, Isaac and Talitha Forsythe, are buried in the Johnson cemetery. Talitha was raised in a Christadelphian family, Isaac was baptized late in life. Only two or three of their children came into the Truth, including Marie's Dad who, with his wife Amanda, was baptized in Jersey City in the 1930s.

I don't know at what time in his life Brother Johnson served as a state representative. [Evidently, he campaigned for a seat in the state legislature, but was never elected: GB.] But the rules were the same back then. I know it was difficult for some to stay uninvolved with politics. The Johnsons had been very much into politics and government for generations, and it would have been especially hard for them. Sister Martin never, of course, recounted anything negative about the family – especially her father, whom she revered. You know of course that her husband, Judge Clarence Martin, came into the Truth and retired from the bench at some point. I did read in an old Christadelphian magazine where Brother Martin was being reinstated in fellowship, indicating obviously that he had been out – probably because of some political activity. Sister Martin would never have mentioned anything about that. I greatly treasure the visits I had with Sister Martin. Not only was she a mine of information, and very knowledgeable in the Truth, she had the most wonderful sense of humor.

So if indeed Brother Johnson did serve in the legislature after becoming a Christadelphian he would have been out of fellowship for some period of time. I have been told that in later life he was a source of stability and good sense through the various ecclesial problems that often plagued the body. Though not a "speaking brother" he was respected and his opinion was valued and listened to. I read a short biography of him somewhere in the library written by Lyndon's mother. She obviously did not agree with his religious views, but she wrote about how strong his convictions were. You may have read the piece [GB: actually cited above]. She obviously respected her father-in-law very much and recognized how much his religion meant to him.

You've probably heard this story too. Sister Martin said she was driving in to Austin to do some shopping and stopped by her brother's home in Johnson City. (This was LBJ's father of

course.) He was in bed ill at the time, and he mentioned to her that he wanted to be baptized. She said she told him she would get a brother to baptize him as soon as she got back from Austin. But upon her return he had either died or was too near death for the baptism to take place. So in his case, he knew what the Truth was but had chosen political interests instead – until the very end. That at least was her memory of the event.

