

# Colonel Abda Johnson

*Cartersville's First Mayor*

*By Joe F. Head*

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As the city of Cartersville celebrates its 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on February 1, 2025, it is also fitting to recognize Cartersville's first mayor, Abda Johnson. While the city was chartered in 1850, it was reincorporated in 1872 with a duly elected council and mayor.

Abda Johnson was the son of Lindsay (1792-1863) and Sarah Oglesby (1808-1832) Johnson of Elbert County, GA and was born October 8, 1824. He died July 10, 1881. Abda Johnson married Frances (Fannie) Trippe from Cass County on March 30, 1852, and according to the 1880 census they had five children: Lilla, George, Albert, Frances, and Julia. Abda and Frances are both buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Section 3 beside General P. M. B Young family graves. Death records reflect the family lived on the former Market Street (Cherokee Ave) in the 1880's. Abda

attended Franklin College (University of Georgia) and is listed in the 1845-46 class directory as a senior. He became an attorney and began his career in Gwinnett County.

In light of owning eleven slaves, according to the 1860 census, Johnson along with other influential Cass County families opposed secession and sent delegates to the state convention with instructions to vote against the ordinance. Johnson passionately loved his community and state and was committed to share the fate of whatever the consequences. When the Civil War did break out, Johnson raised a regiment of CSA volunteers (40<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry) and was appointed Captain. Men were recruited from Bartow, Floyd, Gordon and other surrounding counties. They collected at Camp McDonald in Kennesaw (Big Shanty) for training where he was elected Colonel and then deployed to Tennessee and Mississippi.

Johnson fought in many engagements, was wounded in Vicksburg on July 4, and taken prisoner of war. While in Vicksburg he was paroled by the United States of America on July 6, 1863, and took an oath not to take up arms against the nation nor serve as a guard for prisoners, stores, or depots.

However, records further show he surrendered in Greensboro, NC on April 26, 1865. Johnson saw combat firsthand on many occasions. One particular engagement was in Tazewell East Tennessee where he and the 40<sup>th</sup> Georgia and regiments from Alabama flanked and routed the 42nd and 16th Ohio capturing 159 Union troops. He was known by his troops as a brave and honorable man who equally shared the suffering on the battlefield.

Prior to the Civil War, Bartow County was known as Cass County and Cassville was the County Seat. However, following the war destruction in 1865, the citizens voted to relocate the county seat to the more prosperous town of Cartersville that sat directly on the Western and Atlantic rail line. The original county seat of Cassville was some two miles east of the old Cass Station disadvantaging it from immediate rail traffic and the community had been completely destroyed by Union Troops.

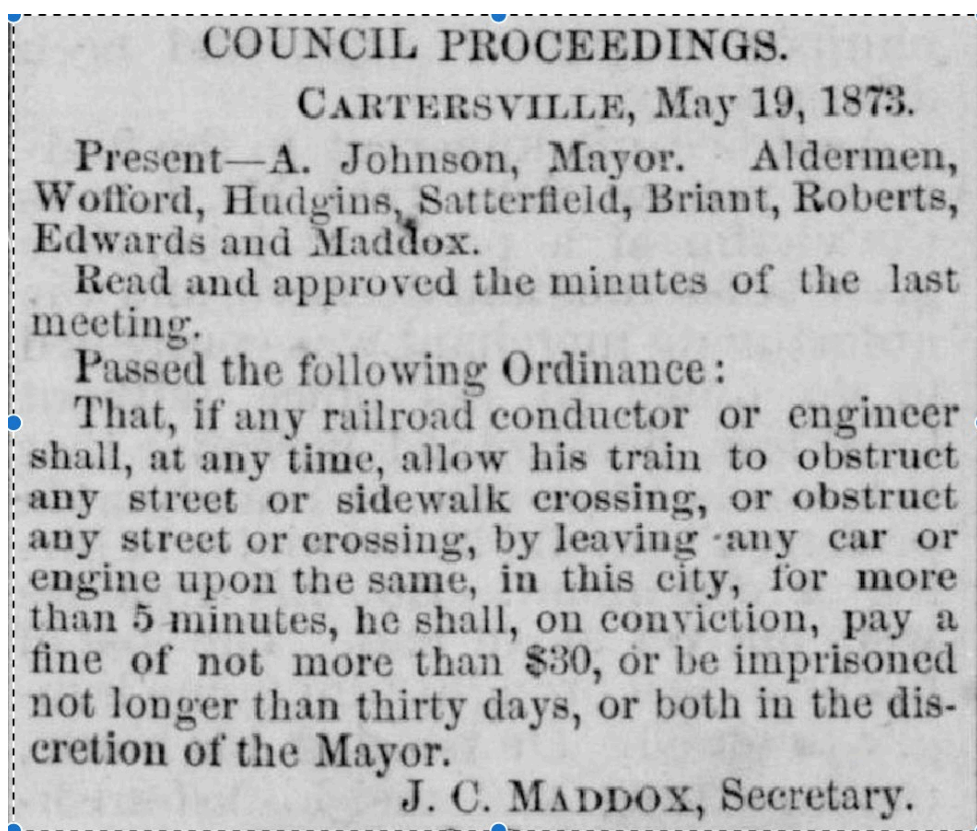
Johnson returned home to a ruined Cass community and began to rebuild by moving to Cartersville. He ascended rapidly in his law profession and became leader of the Cartersville Bar and a respected member of the Cherokee Circuit. He was held in high regard by his legal peers and known to be a generous man by local citizens. In 1871 he was named as a trustee of the Cartersville Female High School for women opened by Miss Lottie Moon (Charlotte Diggs) and Miss Anna C. Safford.

The 1880 Bartow County tax digest lists that he had two large parcels of land including an 800 acre and 4,300 acre tracts in the Pine Log region of Bartow County. A quick review at the Bartow County deed records indicate Johnson was an active real estate player with over 90 transactions ranging from residences to large tracts of wilderness land in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 23rd Districts. In the late 1870's he purchased much of his properties from Sheriff Franklin at the courthouse steps as the highest bidder on overdue taxes. Many transactions continued under his name and estate by his wife following his death.

Cartersville was chartered February 1 of 1850 with five commissioners including: R. H. Cannon, W. W. Leak, William H. Puckett, J. F. Sproull, and Coleman Pitts, but with no Mayor. However, the town was reincorporated in August 1872 with four Wards and an elected Mayor, Abda Johnson and eight aldermen. (Ward 1 - A. P. Wofford, A. R. Hudgens, Ward 2 – J. C. Maddox, G. J. Briant, Ward 3 W. C. Edwards, M. B. McGinty, - Ward 4 R. C. Roberts, R. W. Satterfield.) In those days a term was for one year and Johnson only served as mayor for one term. Similarly, Johnson represented the County in the state legislature in 1855 – 56, but found he had no appetite for politics and did not run for a second term. He was known to be a modest and humble man, and did not advertise his legal services in the local papers as did his colleagues.

A review of local period newspapers including: *The Free Express* and *The Standard & Express* reveal scant coverage of Council actions during his term. However, one report was found by Researcher Sam Graham that proves some things just don't change in Cartersville.

On May 29, 1873 *The Standard Express* printed the following ordinance passed by the Council regarding the railroad congestion.



At age 57 Johnson died at his home following dinner while sitting in his library on July 10, 1881 from what was diagnosed as inflammatory rheumatism. His sudden death followed an ailing number of months preceding his passing. In fact, his health had improved and everyone thought he was on the road to a full recovery. According to the June 11, 1903, *News and*

*Courant* paper, his father and son died at approximately the same age and seemingly of the similar illnesses.

The next morning the local Bar assembled to make arrangements to prepare a resolution to include wearing a badge of mourning for a 30-day period and the Bar would attend the funeral as a body. The Bartow Superior Court honored Abda Johnson in its February 5, 1882 minutes with four pages of poetically polished accolades and lamented his service, citing a life of dignity, kindness, dedication to family, his love for practicing law, military conduct, bravery in the heat of battle, and love for community. The Superior Court directed that a copy of the memorial minutes be sent to the family and *Cartersville Free Press*.

In summary, Abda Johnson's memory has faded in Cartersville History. However, his short, but, notable life, spanned an impressive list of accomplishments including education, real estate, Trustee of the University of Georgia, elected public servant, Royal Mason, military leader/officer, faithful Methodist and Cartersville's first Mayor!

## Sources:

### Research Acknowledgements

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Sam Graham   | Researcher                                 |
| Patty Worley | Genealogist                                |
| Dale Black   | Sons of the Confederacy (Stiles/Akin Camp) |

### Newspapers, Books, Internet, US Census

|                          |   |                               |
|--------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Bartow GenWeb            | Oak Hill Cemetery                                   | Section 3                     |
| Standard Express         | Council Proceedings                                 | May 29, 1873. P2              |
| Cartersville Express     | <i>He Sinks To Rest</i> , Abda Johnson Obit,        | July 12, 1881                 |
| Free Press               | Bartow County Sheriff Sales,                        | August 25, 1881               |
| Atlanta Constitution     | Abda Johnson Obituary,                              | July 13, 1881                 |
| The News and Courant     | Dropped Dead in Court Room,                         | June 11, 1903                 |
| Southern Confederacy     | Battle of Tazewell (Atlanta, Georgia)               | 1862 08 17_2.jpg              |
| History of Bartow County | Lucy Cunyus,  | 1933                          |
| The Standard & Express   | "Our City Council"                                  | September 19, 1872            |
| US Census Records        | 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 (1860 Slave Schedule)     |                               |
| Ancestry.com             | Abda Johnson Genealogy                              |                               |
| Ancestry.com             | Civil War Records, Fold 3, Prisoner of War Records, | July 5, 1863                  |
| Bartow Court Minutes     | 1882 02 04,   | 1879–1882 page 634-63, 5.jpg  |
| Bartow Court Minutes     | 1879–1882,  | 1882 02 04 page 636-63, 7.jpg |

GenWeb <http://gabartow.org/Bios/bio.JohnsonAbda.shtml> 1826 – 1881, [Laurel Baty](#)



University of Georgia Centennial Alumni Catalog from the Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Graduation Program, Abda Johnson, 1826-1881, Vol. 6, p. 77-80

