



DR. FLORENCE DITTO, DR. JOHNSON DITTO, MARILLOIS AND
MARTHA BEHIND THEIR HOUSE IN RAINIER, 1923

DRS. DITTO PRACTICED IN RAINIER FROM 1915 TO 1929

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In the early 1900's it was even harder to find a doctor in Rainier than it is now. When Dr. Florence and Dr. Johnson Ditto came to Rainier, they were well received and became very active in the community.

Johnson Frank Ditto came from a family of eight children. He was born in Waussen, Ohio in 1882. His parents Lois E. Cunningham and George Ditto moved the family to Nebraska when the three eldest were still small and settled on a homestead north of Brady and Gothenberg. Brothers and sisters included Fannie, Ira, Effie (died in infancy), Will, Harley, Evie (teacher at Swedetown school), and Erie (taught at Apiary School — 1921 and later at Delena, Lost Creek, Fernhill, and Pleasant Valley). Several members of his family came to stay in Rainier for a while and he helped his sister Erie, a single school teacher, to adopt a child (Yvonne) which was not a common practice in those days.

Johnson is described by his adopted niece as being rather "slight and puny" while growing up. He later filled out and is shown in some corn roast pictures as being short and stocky.

After completing his college education in Nebraska, he continued on to the National Medical University and College of Physicians and Surgeons in St. Louis. He received his degree in 1915 and first located in Rainier.

In 1910 he had married Florence L. West, a classmate who lived in Nebraska. She too had learned chiropractics to help earn their way through medical school. They both earned highest honors although hers were not bestowed as she was a woman.

After graduation, they set out for Alaska, but got waylaid in Portland and then on to Rainier as there was such a shortage of doctors. During WW I, Dr. Johnson was stationed at Fort Lewis as a Captain in the Cavalry. He had previously served in 1898 in the Spanish American War.

There had been seven children in Dr. Florence's family: Florence, Lucinda, Maude, Rose, Sarah, Angie, and Nellie Maude. She was born in 1889 in Brady, Nebraska and graduated from high school in 1909. She was president of her class, an outstanding scholar, and an ardent sportswoman. She taught school for a year, learned chiropractics, and then went on to Medical School.

While her husband was called to service in WWI, she worked very hard to build up their practice in Rainier. Her children remember that she worked too hard, which could account for her early death at age 50 in 1943. She was also asthmatic. Florence was not only a fine surgeon, but could create beautiful children's clothes on a sewing machine. She was ambidextrous which helped a great deal in operating.

The Dittos lived in Rainier from 1915 until 1929 and after being here two years, they turned the house next door to them into a clinic. They lived in the Skeans' house (now Fred Bell's studio). Simple operations could be performed in Rainier, but complicated ones had to be taken to Portland. One man had his hands burned by electricity and needed a special nurse. He lost his hands and practical nurses Mrs. Darby, Mrs. Ingraham, Mrs. Pratt, and Aunt Mae Johnson helped him as well as many others to recover. There were no trained nurses. Doctor Florence once took a piece of steel out of a workman's eye with no anesthetic.

If a baby were to be born as in the case of Mrs. Whitbeck, Dr. Florence would stay home and wait until the child was born. The delivery charge was \$25 and if the roads were muddy, they would ride as far as they could and walk the remainder of the way. Few homes had direct access to a road.

Dr. Johnson would often take his two daughters Marilois (1919) and Martha (1921) and later his son Jack (1927) on his house calls in his Essex which was one of the first cars in Rainier. They would sing as they rode along and many times while calling on remote logging camps and lumber mills as those in Prescott, they would get stuck in the mud and would have to be pulled out.

It was in this way that the Dittos were responsible for the first corn roast, an annual event at the Schriebers in Rainier. They were on their way to make a house call and they thought they would stop in at the Schriebers. Hilda said that she was canning corn when they surprised her with some food for a potluck supper. It became a habit from that time on to stop every year at corn time. The children were given rides in a wheelbarrow and their children remember it as one of the few times each year when the whole family was together in one place.

Both Johnson and Florence were active in the community. Dr. Johnson's tenor voice could be heard in the Methodist church where Marilois started playing the piano at age eight. Florence was active in Eastern Star; and the Shakespeare Club met in their home. Dr. Johnson volunteered to be mayor of Rainier in order to settle a dispute that had split the town. His action brought about peace. He loved to play golf and he and his wife would take the ferry to Longview to play on occasion.

Their professional life limited their family life and their three children were often left in the care of Aunt Mae Johnson, Lou Jamison, Martha Darby, and Alma or Mina Mullins to name a few. They saw their parents in between patients and their kitchen was quite a center of activity. There were always great quantities of food on hand as patients would often pay in meat or produce.

The same ambition that made Dr. Florence work so hard in Rainier also made her want to go to Portland where there were larger hospitals to make their work easier and professional clubs and other activities to occupy their time. Also their children's talents were developing and they wanted more education for them so they did move to Portland in 1930. Many went to see them there rather than change doctors.

The Dittos were well-liked. Dr. Florence was an especially hard worker and expected much from those around her, but she was also generous. She took some of them to plays and concerts who would not otherwise have been able to go.

All three children have achieved success in foreign service and Marilois has become very accomplished in her music. Hilda Schrieber remembers her mother, Mae Johnson, being Marilois' chaperone in the summer of 1935 when she received a music scholarship to Los Angeles. Hilda, Joe, and Mae enjoyed many Thanksgiving dinners with them after they left Rainier and it was good for them to renew old friendships at the corn roast each year.

CHILDREN

Martha — Born June 26, 1921, married Flavio Espesito whom she met in Spain and became consul in Mexico. She attended St. Helens Hall in Portland. Has used her talents being a good diplomat for the United States. Is now living in Southern California. Has two children Linda Francesca born in Hong Kong and Michael Armad born there also.

Marilois — Born July 14, 1919, married Frank Kierman (one time director of drama at Reed College in Portland). Won Oregon Music Teachers' Association contest; member of Junior Symphony (1935). Had a 2-3 yr. tour in East Africa. Now in New Jersey. Taught at Princeton. Has two children Sean (attended Antioch College, diplomatic service in South Africa, married an Irish girl) and Jean (attended British schools, outstanding in music, attended Oberlin college, married a cellist).

Jack — Born September 11, 1922, a group charter coordinator for Pan American Airways-Pacific Alaska Division. Now in Tehran. Has one child Carlin Rose who has majored in horsemanship.