

**Spud Johnson**  
**Kansas City 1888**



## Spud Johnson

**Positions:** Outfielder and Third Baseman

**Bats:** Left • **Throws:** Left

5-9, 175lb (175cm, 79kg)

**Born:** December 1856 in [Canada](#) 

**Debut:** April 18, 1889 (Age 32, 1,319th in MLB history)

**Last Game:** August 8, 1891 (Age 34)

**Rookie Status:** Exceeded rookie limits during 1889 season

**Full Name:** James Ralph Johnson

The Niagara Base-Ball Club held a meeting and lunch last evening at Parlor 1, Brevoort House, and reorganized for the season of 1884, as follows; E. H. Griggs, Manager; W. D. Coles, Secretary; Ralph Johnson, Captain and 3b.; Charles Vehmeyer, c.; Andrew Wigeland, 1b.; Joe Mullany, p.; Ed Gavin, 2b.; Fred Baker, s.s.; J. C. Moodey, l. f.; W. O. Chamberlin, c. f.; James Johnson, r. f.

Chicago Tribune Dec 23, 1883

Ralph Johnson, Chicago's most promising amateur player, has signed to play third base for the Topeka club. Johnson has been connected with the Traders Insurance company for years. Many a manager has tried to get him before, but of no avail. Now that he has concluded to play ball, watch him, for he will not be unknown very long.

St. Joseph News Press December 24, 1886

The Chicago correspondent of the St. Louis *Sporting News* speaks thus of Johnson: "Topeka, besides obtaining a first class third baseman and a strong left-handed batsman in Ralph Johnson, of this city, also secures a perfect gentleman. Although this is Johnson's first professional engagement, it will be found that he is no novice at the national game. He has seen a good many seasons' service on the diamond, principally with the local Garden Cities.

The Topeka Daily Commonwealth March 23, 1887

### **Base Ball News.**

Remember the Des Moines games April 4th and 5th.

The grand stand is nearly completed and when finished will be the finest in the league.

Ralph Johnson, our new third baseman, and Joe Ardner, the keeper of second bag, arrived yesterday.

Hefner is expected daily; Conway and Ounson and Ralph Johnson will be here the first of the week.

Macullar, our clever little left-handed short stop, was a member of the Cincinnati team in 1882.

Topeka State Journal March 30, 1887

Ralph Johnson, the popular third baseman of the Golden Giants, brought back with him an immense walking stick, which he purchased in Lincoln for protection.

Topeka Daily Press August 17, 1887

Ralph Johnson, the popular third baseman of the Topeka club, has opportunities to sign next season with either Chicago or Pittsburg.

Topeka Daily Pres September 27, 1887

### **New Western League Men.**

The new men that have signed and whose contracts have been officially promulgated with the new Western Base Ball association, so far, are as follows:

St. Paul—John Corbett, Fred Jevene, Taylor Shafer, Charles Riley and Joe Inest.

Milwaukee—E. L. Mills, William Shinkle, William Fuller, Alex Fersom, F. E. Pettee, Joe Strauss, R. L. Lowe and D. J. Davin.

Des Moines—Harry Sage, Joe Quinn, Dan Stearns, W. J. Vandyke, W. C. Alvord and William Traffley.

Chicago—Fred Lang, D. E. Dongdale, E. M. Hingle, John Crogan, J. E. Dunns, George Rooks and H. C. Long.

Oskosh—J. O. Connell, W. B. Burdick and Joe Miller.

Kansas City—Ralph Johnson, Jim Manning, Jim Lillie, Charles Swartzel and Charles Reynolds.

St. Louis—Bill Gleason and Nat Hudson.

Minneapolis—None.

Omaha—Jack Messitt.

Omaha Daily Bee November 2, 1887

#### **Engagement of Players for 1888.**

Sam Morton yesterday sent out official notices of the engagement of players for the season of 1888 as follows: Minneapolis, G. E. Winkleman, M. Lynch, W. F. Knight, G. Klopff; Kansas City, J. R. Johnson, J. H. Manning, J. B. Gunson, P. B. Swartzel, C. L. Reynolds, James Conway, Jake Welis, Ed Cortwright, Joseph A. Ardner, John A. McCarty; Chicago Association, J. E. Dallis, Eugene Moriarity; Cincinnati, Hugh Nicol, J. W. Keenan, H. Kappell, W. W. Carpenter, J. A. McPhee, W. T. Serad; Louisville, Sam Smith, H. Easterday; St. Louis Browns, Charles Alcott, J. W. Holliday; St. Paul, William Earl; Toronto, Dennis Connors; Washington, John Irwin; New York, Elmer Foster (instead of Indianapolis), E. E. Cleveland; Des Moines, F. C. Smith, J. F. Macullar; Athletics, M. J. Sullivan, L. Bierbauer, Fred J. Mann, T. J. Poorman, H. D. Stovey, G. H. Townsend; Brooklyn, W. D. O'Brien, W. H. Halbert, A. Mays, E. Cunningham; Wheeling, A. C. Buckenberger, R. Van Sant, E. J. Stapleton; Mansfield, O., F. H. O'Brien, W. D. O'Brien, W. H. Halbert, and Al Mays were released from reservation by the Metropolitan club.

Chicago Tribune Nov 3, 1887

Ralph Johnson, the favorite of the last year's Topeka base ball team, is now running a cosy little billiard parlor on Delaware street, just below the Turf and Field Exchange in Kansas City.

Topeka Daily Press March 23, 1888

Ralph Johnson leads the western association batting list.

Daily Commonwealth August 5, 1888

The Cowboys, of Kansas City, have purchased the release of Pitcher Hoffman, of the San Antonio Club, paying \$1,000 for him. Ralph Johnson, the Western Association team's third baseman, will go to Detroit, his release having been sold for \$1,000.

The Macon Republican August 16, 1888

for, and in nearly every instance there has been a cut made. The players do not seem in a hurry to sign at the salaries offered, and the management does not appear to be at all anxious. Ralph Johnson, who played third for the Blues last season, has written Frank Ringo that he intends to go to Sacramento for the season of 1889, as the St. Joseph people have only offered him \$200 a month. M. D. Hurley, of Peoria, formerly Secretary of the Central Interstate League, is an applicant for Association umpire. He was very successful as an umpire in the Western League in 1886.

St. Louis Globe Democrat January 6, 1889

—Ralph Johnson one of the players assigned to St. Joseph from the Kansas City Blues, refuses to come here. He declares he will not sign even if he is blacklisted. Manager Lord wants \$3,000 to release him. Johnson only wants to pay \$300 or \$400.

St. Joseph News Press January 10, 1889

**The Columbus club was completed last week by the signing of third baseman Ralph Johnson, of the Kansas City club.**

Harrisburg Telegraph January 15, 1889

**Ralph Johnson in Luck.**  
COLUMBUS, O., March 20.—The much-talked-about and well-advertised case of Ralph Johnson, about whom Columbus and Kansas City have been at swords' points ever since the beginning of this year, came to an abrupt and unexpected termination today by the receipt of a telegram directed to A. B. Cohen, a director of the Columbus club, from N. E. Young, which read as follows:  
"Kansas City has released Johnson. Go ahead and sign him. Accept congratulations."  
The message had not been here five minutes before Manager Buckenberger had Johnson's name to a contract, the third since January 1. The local enthusiasts are wild with joy, for it looks like a hard earned victory and directly against the ruling of President Byrne and the board of arbitration. A purse has been started for Johnson to reimburse him in part for the loss he sustained by not accepting Washington's offer last Thursday. In ten minutes' time \$100 was raised for him. It will be swelled to \$500 before the season opens.

Topeka Daily Capital March 21, 1889

Bethune-like step.

The League clubs have been doing a little neck twisting themselves. Cleveland has dropped both Ralph Johnson and Jerry Denny and signed Martin Sullivan. Pittsburgh has taken that star among all fielders, "Pop" Corkhill. The Phillies dropped Pitcher Cassian and Eddie Mayer and then took the latter back. Uncle Anson turned Catcher Bowman adrift and signed a New Englander named Merritt to succeed him. The national board took Halligan away from Cincinnati and declared his Omaha release fraudulent. New York and Boston

Lima News (Ohio) August 31, 1891

—A despatch from Syracuse states that Ralph Johnson has been signed by the Rochester club. Johnson has acquired a good deal of reputation as a heavy batting outfielder, and his engagement will be a great gain for the home team.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle June 3, 1892

—Joe Sommer has been released and Ralph Johnson will take his place in left field. The new man played with the Cleveland National League Club last year. He is a good hitter. Sommer's fielding has been first-class, but he has not been hitting the ball effectively this season.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle June 4, 1892

from the National League.  
Pitcher Fournier, of the New Havens, was assigned to Syracuse, Cross, Shannon, Griffin and Donnelly to Buffalo, Beecher to Elmira provisionally, Pitcher Gruber to Troy, Catcher Gray to Providence, Pitcher Devlin to Albany, Pettie and Flanigan to Troy. Bader will come to Rochester, and will play in the outfield in Johnson's place, the latter, it is announced, having been called West to see his mother, who is very sick.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle June 20, 1892



of be sent to the sufferers in the late St. Louis  
 id disaster. The local nine will be made up as  
 w follows: Ralph Johnson, the ex-leaguer, who  
 d led the association in '88, and was third in the  
 d American Association in 1889 and second in  
 '90. His weight is 235 pounds, and his last ap-  
 -0 pearance was with the Cleveland nine in '91.  
 -0 He is now editor of Stage and Field.  
 — Lou Shoenick played first base for In-  
 id dianapolis. He had the distinction of being  
 1-

Daily Inter Ocean June 14, 1896

Ralph Johnson, the veteran ball player, who several years ago played with the Cleveland and Columbus Baseball teams, was at the game yesterday. Ralph headed a delegation of 65 excursionists from Portsmouth, Ohio. Ralph is now in business in Portsmouth, and is doing well. He was accompanied by Billy Gerlach.

The Cincinnati Enquirer August 8, 1898

Ralph Johnson, the veteran ball player, is in good luck. He has just been appointed the resident manager of the Portsmouth (Ohio) Opera House. This is an addition to his cafe and hotel business. Mr. Johnson was in the city yesterday looking for attractions and buying stock.

The Cincinnati Enquirer August 17, 1898

Gene Lutz, manager of Johnny Van Heest, cannot understand why the Portsmouth Athletic Club wants to declare off the match between Van Heest and Eddie Gardner. Lutz is ready to post a forfeit and go on with the match. He would like to hear from Ralph Johnson, of Portsmouth, regarding the match at once. Van Heest has been training hard for his go with Gardner, and protests strongly against having it declared off without cause.

March 31, 1899

Ralph Johnson, the veteran ball player, formerly with the Cleveland, Columbus, Kansas City and other clubs, is in the city. Ralph now runs a hotel and an opera house at Portsmouth. He is going to start an athletic club, and is in town to complete arrangements for a fifteen-round contest between Daniel Rewan and Eddie Gardner. He will meet the representatives of these two men at THE ENQUIRER office this afternoon at 5 o'clock.

The Cincinnati Enquirer April 10, 1899

### **REWAN AND GARDNER.**

There is a great deal of interest manifested in the outcome of the fifteen-round contest between Dannie Rewan, of this city, and Eddie Gardner, a brother of Oscar Gardner. The contest will take place in Portsmouth, Ohio, to-night, at a club under the auspices of Ralph Johnson, the veteran ballplayer. He is looked upon as a winner, and if he is successful with Gardner, may be matched against Johnnie Richie, who recently whipped Patsey Haley.

The Cincinnati Enquirer April 19, 1899

### **NO MORE FIGHTS**

**Will Be Given By the Portsmouth Athletic Club.**

**SPECIAL DISPATCH TO THE ENQUIRER.**

PORTSMOUTH, OHIO, April 20.—The Portsmouth Athletic Club desires it distinctly and thoroughly understood that there will be no more boxing contests here this season. The Bain-Bolan contest and all others are off and none will be taken on. It desires THE ENQUIRER to make this announcement in order that the boxing contingent may understand that there is nothing here for them at present and may avoid trouble and the chance of arrest by avoiding matches made by irresponsible parties.

The Cincinnati Enquirer April 21, 1899



## Twenty-four Years Ago

"The Mecca" was the name given by Ralph Johnson to the new drink emporium which he opened in the Jones building on Chillicothe street.

Portsmouth Daily Times August 31, 1923... 24 years ago was 1899

Name:	James R Johnson						
Census Year:	1880						
Gender:	Female						
Age:	23						
Marital Status:	Single						
Race:	White						
Relationship:	Sister						
Residence:	Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States						
Birthplace:	Canada						
Birth Year:	1857						
Household Members:	<table> <tr> <th>Name</th><th>Age</th></tr> <tr> <td><a href="#">Q William Johnson</a></td><td>49</td></tr> <tr> <td><a href="#">Q Mary J Johnson</a></td><td>46</td></tr> </table>	Name	Age	<a href="#">Q William Johnson</a>	49	<a href="#">Q Mary J Johnson</a>	46
Name	Age						
<a href="#">Q William Johnson</a>	49						
<a href="#">Q Mary J Johnson</a>	46						

Johnson William	49	Husband	1	Insurance agent	Canada	Canada	Canada	49
- Mary J	46	Wife	1	House work	Canada	Canada	Canada	46
- James R	23	Son	1	RR Clerk	Canada	Canada	Canada	23

NAME: **James R. Johnson**

BIRTH DATE: **1860**

BIRTH PLACE: **Nova Scotia, Canada**

DEATH DATE: **11 Jul 1914**

DEATH PLACE: **Lowell, Middlesex County,  
Massachusetts, United  
States of America**

CEMETERY: **Saint Patrick Cemetery**

BURIAL OR CREMATION PLACE: **Lowell, Middlesex County,  
Massachusetts, United  
States of America**

HAS BIO?: **N**

<https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/ralph-spud-johnson-3167378e5ace>

That mystery is made all the more tantalizing by the details that have emerged. James Ralph Johnson was born in Upper Canada in December of 1856, the son of William and Mary Johnson, mundane names that add to the difficulty of tracing the family. No vital record provides the exact location, but there is only one family on the 1861 census of Upper Canada that remotely fits the known details, and it is such an exact match that it seems safe to assume this to be the family of the future ballplayer. The entry in question is from Seneca Township, a rural community on the Niagara Peninsula, and it shows five-year-old Ralph to have been the youngest of three children. Living next door to the Johnsons are Ralph's grandparents, Lavinia and Merritt Johnson, the latter picturesquely listed as a "yeoman."

The last known press reference to Johnson's wife appeared in 1889. Exactly when and where she died remains yet another unknown, but the 1900 census lists him as a widower, living with his parents and his now seventeen-year-old daughter Hazel, so presumably Mary Louise Johnson had died during the intervening decade. That loss was followed by the death of his father in 1902 and of his mother in 1906. Back in Canada, his venerable grandfather, by now listed simply as a "gentleman," also passed away.

5	Johnson	William	Mr	Jan	1851	62	M	48	Canada	Eng	Canada	Eng	Canada	Eng	1865	35	Na	26-6-6	0
	Mary	Johnson	Wife	Jan	1838	65	M	48	Canada	Eng	Maryland	Canada	Eng	1865	35	Na	26-6-6	0	
	James	R	Son	Dec	1856	43	M	3	Canada	Eng	Canada	Eng	Canada	Eng	1861	5	Na	26-6-6	0
	Hazel	Johnson	Daughter	July	1882	17	F	5	Illinois	Ill	Canada	Eng	Illinois	Ill	1898	16	Na	26-6-6	0

While back in Chicago, Ralph Johnson found work as a solicitor and renewed his connection to baseball. In 1906, he was one of more than a hundred locals who formed an old-time ballplayer's association and were the guests of Charley Comiskey at a White Sox game. But when the death of his parents and the 1907 wedding of his daughter Hazel left him again free to roam, he moved to New York and his doings again became the subject of press interest. According to one account, "Old-time third baseman Ralph Johnson is an executive at the Hotel Vendome, 41st and Broadway, and hopes to persuade clubs to stay there." Several other articles had him back in show business, including one in December of 1908 that reported that Johnson had attended baseball's recent winter meetings and was "now in the theatrical business ... He can be addressed care of the *Dramatic Mirror*, New York City."