1884–1890: In 1882, President John Taylor asked Benjamin and his family to help colonize Mexico to create a place of refuge for the Saints. He traveled to Arizona and in 1884 traveled to Mexico with Brigham Young, Jr., and Heber J. Grant to visit the Yaqui Indians.

In 1890, BFJ was warned by his stake president in Mesa that he would be arrested for having more than one wife, so he would have to leave for Mexico. He arrived in Colonia Díaz, where members of his extended family lived. He determined to live in Mexico and sold his property in Tempe and Mesa. He invited his wives to join him but did not receive a response from any of them.

In 1891, Mexico suffered a devastating drought, and Benjamin’s nursery and gardens failed. Benjamin also suffered ill health, and when his family urged him to return to Mesa, Benjamin decided it was time to go. He left Mexico by train and arrived in Mesa in December 1891.

Things to see in Mexico:

- **Mormon Colonies Museum**—Colonia Juarez. Built on the site of the original schoolhouse.
1882–1905: BFJ and many of his family moved to the Tempe/Mesa area in 1882. He bought land from the Hayden family. He was ordained a Patriarch by Apostle B. Young, Jr., on 7 January 1883. BFJ traveled between Arizona, Utah, and Mexico several times. He was also taken to court because of polygamy. His brother, Joseph Ellis, died in Mesa in 1882, and his daughter, Susan Celestia, died in 1883. Benjamin Franklin Johnson, Jr., died in Tempe in 1884.

Benjamin Franklin Johnson died in Mesa, Arizona, on 18 November 1905. He is buried in the Mesa City Cemetery.

Things to see in Tempe and Mesa:
- **BFJ Tempe Homestead**—located from Farmer St. on the west to Myrtle on the east, 6th Street on the North to University Drive on the South. BFJ’s home was located near Mill Avenue.
- **Mesa City Cemetery**—1212 North Center Street.
- **Mesa Temple and Visitors’ Center**—525 E. Main Street.
- **BFJ Mesa Home**—260 W. 2nd St.
BFJ’s headstone in the Mesa, Arizona, Cemetery.
Benjamin Franklin Johnson had 7 wives and 45 children. Each is important to our heritage. Of his children, 38 grew to maturity, married and had families, one adult daughter died without marrying, and six died as children. This section includes histories of Benjamin’s parents, wives and children. Some of the histories have been edited and abridged from their original version to fit into this book. We encourage you to locate and read the entire histories on the DVD to learn more of Benjamin Franklin Johnson’s marvelous family. Our goal is to share insight into their lives. The order of the histories is first the wife, and then her children, etc.
Ezekiel and Julia (Hills) Johnson

Julia Hills was a daughter of Esther Ellis and Joseph Hills. She was born 26 September 1783, in Upton, Worcester, Massachusetts. Julia’s father, Joseph Hills, died, leaving three children for Esther to raise: Joel (age 6), Julia (age 4), and Nancy (age 2).

On 27 January 1793, Esther married Enoch Forbush—a widower with two sons. They had six more children: Enoch (died young), Joseph, Seneca, Diadamia, Stephen and Enoch.

Julia came from a religious family and grew to womanhood in one of the most imaginative and creative periods of our nation’s history. Julia and her brothers and sisters were given the opportunity of an education. One of her father’s prized possessions was his small, well-used dictionary, which infers that he was an educated man. The family seemed to be very close, and Julia expressed much love and respect for her mother and sisters in her letters.

On 12 January 1801, at the age of 17, Julia became the bride of Ezekiel Johnson, who was 10 years older than she. He was a handsome, stalwart individual, proud and high-spirited. He stood about 5 feet, 10 inches tall and had a solid build. His eyes were a steel blue, and his features well-molded. He had fair skin, and his hair was fine textured and light brown. Julia was attractive, tall and had excellent posture.

4 Taken from the following: Cluff and Gibson (2-48). Abridged and edited by the BFJ Genealogical Research Committee
Ezekiel was the illegitimate son of Bethiah, daughter of Bethiah Lee and Seth Garnsey. As an unmarried young woman, Bethiah gave birth to Ezekiel Johnson on 12 January 1773, in Uxbridge, Massachusetts. After Ezekiel was born, Bethiah continued to live in the home of her mother and stepfather, Ebenezer Smith. When Ezekiel was almost three years old, Ebenezer and his family moved from Uxbridge to Douglas, which was about seven miles away. Two months after this move, Bethiah and Jonathan King filed intentions to be married in Douglas.

As an adult, Ezekiel expressed the idea that his father died while serving in the American Revolutionary War. At least, that was the story he told his own children. This may have been the story his mother told him, to ease the social stigma of being labeled a “bastard” child.

When Ezekiel married Julia Hills, he had in his possession a calfskin pocketbook. Stamped in gold leaf on one side was the name, James King, and stamped on the other side was the date, April 1742. Ezekiel said the purse belonged to his stepfather, Jonathan King. The old purse was stuffed with papers, one with his mother’s signature, Bethiah Garnsey. Two of the documents were promissory notes dated 1 March and 2 March 1797, at Albany, New York, in which a John Billing promised to pay Ezekiel Johnson 30 pounds, 5 shillings on December 1st next. Another was a note from Peter Jasbrough promis-

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5 Bethiah has also been recorded as Sethiah.

6 Garnsey has also been recorded as Gurnsey and various other spellings.

7 Descendants have long searched for Ezekiel’s father. A DNA project in 2005 revealed that Ezekiel belonged to the family of Ezekiel Johnson born 25 June 1750, in Bellingham, Massachusetts, son of Isaac Johnson and Susanna Thayer.
ing to pay Ezekiel Johnson 25 pounds, 5 shillings and 6 pence within three months. Three notes were drawn up and signed on 11 November 1797, by Caleb Noble of Floyd. One note was for 15 dollars to be paid in cash or grain by March 1st next and the other, a bill for 24 cowbells purchased by Mr. Noble. The note stated that the bells were sold for 12 shillings each, and the note was due March 1st next. Possibly, Ezekiel was in the business of selling cowbells, and his business possibly took him a considerable distance from the area he knew as a child.

Ezekiel’s children remembered well the often-told story of their father and how he came to have the old calfskin pocketbook in his possession. As Ezekiel told the story, his chance to escape came when he was in his thirteenth year. His stepfather had given him the purse and sent him on an errand to collect a debt owed to him by a neighbor. He had been instructed to carefully place the payment into the leather pouch, hand over the debt agreement and return home as quickly as possible with the money. Ezekiel collected the payment and placed it into the pouch as instructed, but when he started for home, it occurred to him that he had within his grasp the financial means to provide for his needs for a while and to be able to live on his own. He pondered the situation and his future and made the decision to take the money and run away. As far as any of the family knows, there is no evidence that Ezekiel ever saw his mother or step-father again.

Although Ezekiel was a fine man of great fortitude, patience and strength, he seemed to have taken little or no interest in religious matters. Julia always had a strong religious conviction and was a very devout Presbyterian. She made sure that her children attended the Presbyterian Church with her, where they learned to read the Bible. The Presbyterians held a strong belief that what we do in this life will affect us in eternity, and this belief strongly influenced Julia in her decisions and actions throughout her life. From their mother, the Johnson children got their religious training and convictions and learned to read. From Ezekiel, their father, they learned the habit of hard work and acquired skills in carpentry, husbandry and agriculture. They learned to clear virgin land, plow and plant crops and to harvest and preserve them for food and seed. They learned to survive meager times and means and to enjoy the “fruits of their honest labors.”