



**Isabelle Johnson**

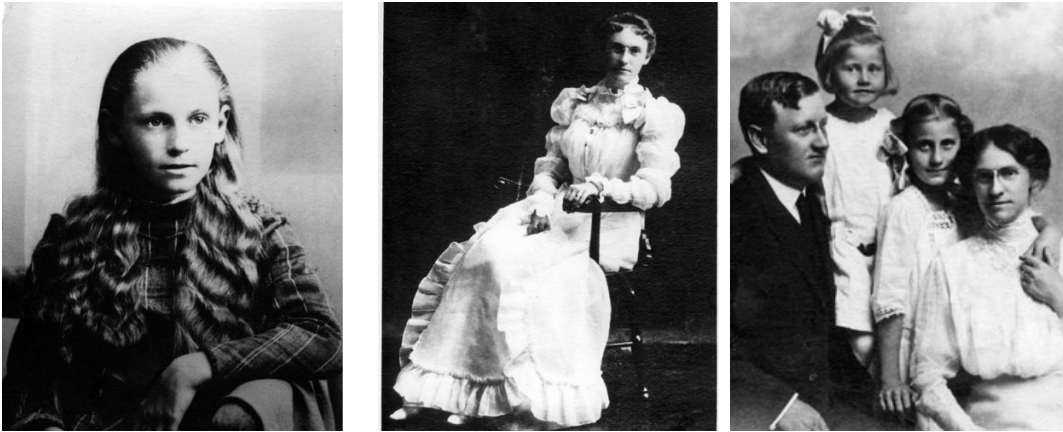
# **A Founding Family of UUCP**



**Bill and Frances Bishop**

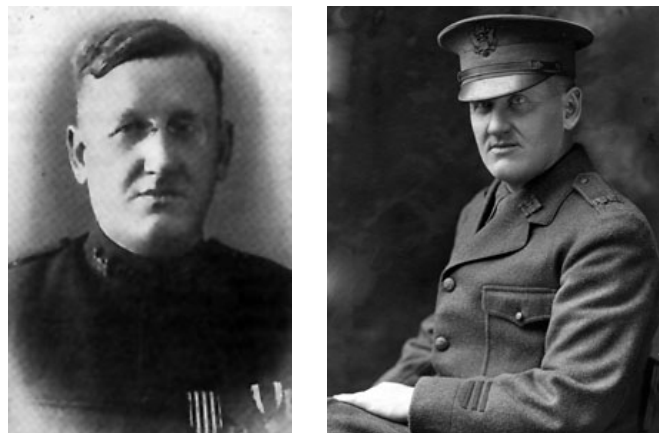
## A FOUNDING FAMILY OF UUCP

### Isabelle Hastings Johnson



Isabelle Hastings in 1892 and in her wedding dress in 1903. The Johnson family in 1916 or 1917

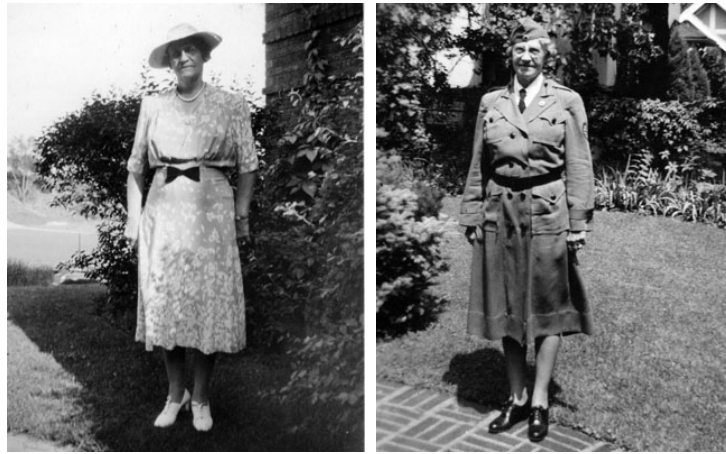
Isabelle Marie Hastings Johnson was born on January 15, 1880 in West Boylston, Massachusetts to Fannie Wilson and William R. Hastings. She graduated from the English High School. In February 1903 she married Benjamin Oliver (B.O.) Johnson and had two daughters, Frances Johnson (Locke Bishop) born on November 1, 1903 in Forsyth, Montana and Helen E. Johnson (Rountree) born on November 8, 1908, in Glendive, Montana.



B.O Johnson went to Worcester Polytechnical Institute (class of 1900), played football, and was a civil engineer. In 1917, B. O. Johnson, along with a group of railroad men in St. Paul, Minnesota, went to Russia as members of the newly formed Russian Railway Service Corps (RRSC), a unit of experienced railroad men formed to improve operations along the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was organized as a military unit and Johnson had the rank of Colonel. According to "An American Railroad Man East of the Urals", 1918-1922, by Frederick C. Giffin, "The RRSC came to Siberia at the request of Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government, which was subsequently ousted from power by Lenin and his followers. Though ostensibly politically neutral, the corps in fact worked closely with anti-Bolshevik forces and played an important role in the Allied military expedition in Siberia of 1918-20."

Shortly after the Bolshevik revolution, B.O. continued to work for the trans-Siberian Railway. He, Isabelle and their daughters lived in China around 1918 or 1919. B.O Johnson was decorated seven times by European and Asian nations for his work. He eventually rose to the position of

senior vice president of Northern Pacific Railroad. The Johnsons lived in Worcester Massachusetts, Montana, and eventually in St. Paul Minnesota by the time of B.O.'s death in 1932 at the age of 54.



Isabelle Johnson in St. Paul, Minnesota in June 1942 and in August 1942 in her civilian uniform for the Red Cross Women's Motor Pool

Isabelle "was a huge women's rights person... and a remarkable person," according to her grandson, George Rountree III. Isabelle was involved in the Minnesota effort to support the women's suffrage amendment. She was also an administrative leader of the Red Cross Motor Corps during WWII. As a part of the WWII women's homefront, Isabelle made sure every man knew she was just as smart and capable as they were; that women could do anything a man could. Isabelle, her daughter Frances Locke, and granddaughter, Joanne Locke moved to Phoenix in 1943.



A group photo in 1947 of the new Unitarian congregation that met at Kenilworth School and a close-up of Isabelle.

In 1946 Rev. Lon Ray Call was sent to Phoenix by the Unitarian Association to organize a church. Isabelle Johnson, who had known Lon Ray Call in the Midwest, was contacted by Rev. Call and asked if she would act as an appointed secretary for the initial meetings and newspaper publicity. She had a strong feeling that the success of a fledgling organization depended very largely on the efforts of the secretary and she wished to assume this responsibility. Her association with new movements went back to the early days of the women's suffrage movement, so she was well aware of the types of problems that might arise. That was the beginning of the First Unitarian Church of Phoenix. Isabelle was board president in 1950.



Isabelle was known for her intelligence and community leadership. In addition to being a founding member of the UUCP, she was also a charter member of the Arizona Country Club, the first and only woman charter member of an Arizona country club at the time. She was a woman ahead of her time. Her daughters clearly inherited her leadership tendencies. Frances was also a founding member of the UUCP and Helen was a Phi Beta Kappa Radcliffe College Graduate, Arizona bridge champion, president of the Junior League and active in the American Red Cross.

She was also careful with her appearance, especially her hair. She had long, wavy hair as a girl. In her later adult life, she kept her hair short but long enough to have perfect curls and waves. Her hair was beautiful, naturally curly and she was very meticulous regarding how professionals cut it, according to her son-in-law.

On Isabelle's 90th birthday, 15 Jan 1970, the Isabelle Johnson room was dedicated at the church in her honor. She died in her home at 1616 W. Glendale, on October 30, 1976. She was survived by her daughters, Frances J. Bishop and Helen Rountree; three grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

Upon her death, her son-in-law, Bill Bishop (also a founding member of the UUCP), wrote this poem about her:

"Now death has solved the Gordian knot  
of life and its complexities,  
Giving peace at last to her tortured body,  
and cleaving clean the tangled web of illness and despair.  
Our hearts shall long remember her, erect of mind and standing straight,  
Prudent, perceptive, quizzical, intolerant only of intolerance,  
Stalwart in her reasoned faith, a citizen of the whole universe,  
Savoring life and loving humankind to her last able moment.  
Thus we shall remember her---  
This great and gentle woman whose life has blessed us all.  
The indignities of dying now fade into the past  
and peace at last is hers;

She lives immortal through our lives."

-William Blauvelt Bishop

## Frances Johnson Locke Bishop



Frances Johnson with her younger sister Helen in 1909. Frances Johnson Locke in August 1940 in St. Paul, Minnesota

Frances Johnson Locke Bishop was born on November 1, 1903 in Forsyth, Montana, the daughter of Isabelle and Benjamin Oliver Johnson. The Johnsons lived in Montana then in China where B O worked on the trans-Siberian railroad after the Bolshevik Revolution. After his death in 1932, Isabelle and Frances lived in St. Paul, Minnesota.



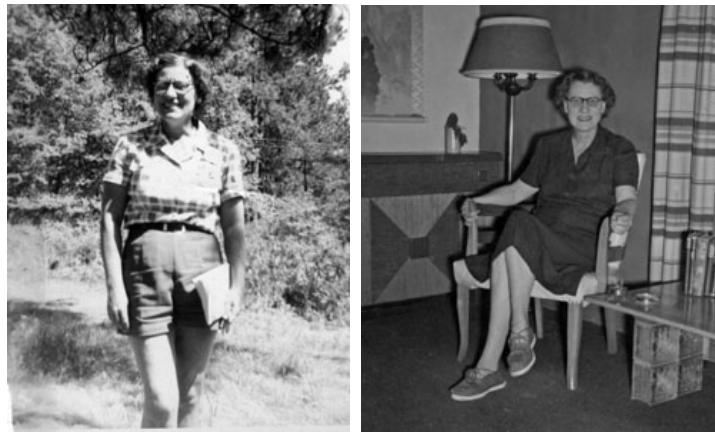
Frances Locke in 1944 with her last kindergarten class at Jackson School in Phoenix.

In 1943, Isabelle, Frances and Frances' daughter, Joanne Locke moved to Phoenix. Frances was a teacher and then a counselor for the Child Study Service of the Phoenix Elementary Schools. Her hobby was woodworking; she made beautiful furniture.



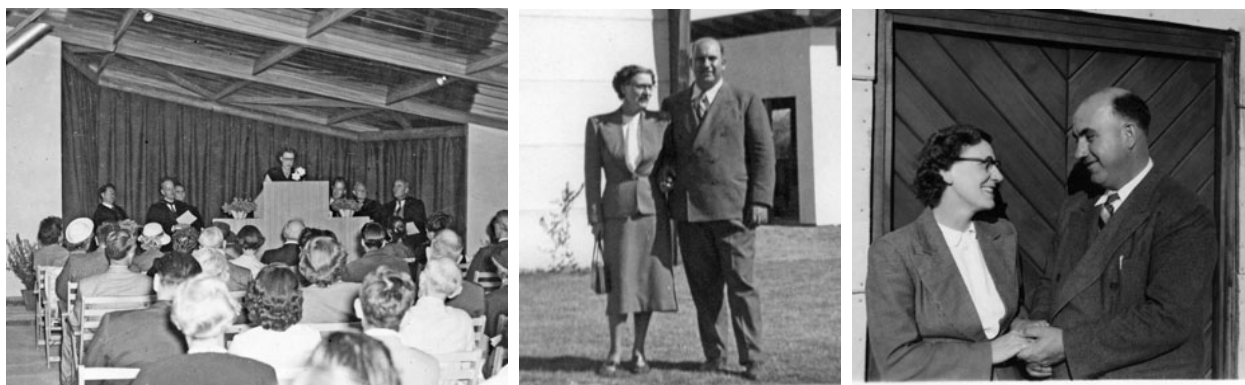


A close-up of Frances and her daughter Joanne Locke from the Kenilworth photograph in 1947.



Left, Frances Locke in June 1951 at a Unitarian Church conference in California. Right, in 1951 at her apartment at 1110 West McDowell. The cabinet and the table with glass blocks were made by Frances.

Frances and William Blauvelt Bishop met during the formation of the Unitarian Church. They are Founding Members of the church. They were married on February 22, 1952 in the church the congregation built at 800 East Pasadena Avenue.



Frances addressing the congregation on the day the new church building was dedicated in 1951.  
Frances and Bill Bishop on their wedding day in 1952.

According to Frances' son-in-law Don Nielsen, "Everybody was very, very proud of the Pasadena church. It was an all-congregational effort to design, construct and finish the building. The effort we remember the most was when many people including Bill, Frances, Joanne and

myself leveled and compacted the soil foundation for the floor, fitted and placed each and every red flagstone (sandstone) into a nice pattern, filled all of the spaces between the stones with freshly prepared concrete and followed quickly by smoothing for a flat and even floor surface. Indeed, it was Frances that directed the procedure. A couple years later, it was exciting for Joanne and me to be married in a church that both of us helped to build - few people these days have that opportunity.”

Frances was an intellectual and active in the youth education programs at the church. She was president of the Board of Trustees in 1951 and 1953. After Bill died in 1987, she moved to a retirement home at the corner of Thomas and 68th St. She died on Dec 13, 1991. Her ashes were buried in the Memorial Garden.



Frances Bishop and her daughter, Joanne Locke in May 1990.



## William Blauvelt Bishop



Bill Bishop in 1947 and with Frances in the 1950s

Bill Bishop was born on Oct 8, 1911 in Wyoming, IL. He was the son of Florence Julia Blauvelt and William Herbert Bishop. He moved to Arizona in 1938 from his native Illinois and worked as a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. He was also poet and owned a used bookstore, the Ostrich Farm and Antique Store. He was a civil rights activist, a member of the Arizona Civil Liberties Union, the Urban League and Planned Parenthood

He was also a founder of the First Unitarian Church of Phoenix and the first and long-time editor of the church newsletter, Horizons. According to Ellie Murphy, he was very friendly and essentially ran the church office for many years. He and Frances Locke married in February 1952 in the church on Pasadena.



The 1953-54 Board of Trustees and a close-up of Bill Bishop

Bill served on the Board of Trustees when the Rev. E. Burdette Backus was minister in 1953-54 and was president of the Board in 1955. Bill was also a gardener. He planted the Palo Verde trees on the south side of the parking lot. He called it the "Bishop Promenade".



Bill with grandchildren Wayne and Cyndy in 1962; Christmas 1976 wearing Wayne's model train cap

He was also a stepfather to Joanne Locke and a grandfather to her and her husband, Don Nielsen's five children, Cynthia Lynn and Pamela Kay born June 12, 1956, Barbara Anne born January 5, 1960, Wayne Edward born April 30, 1962 and David Irvén born June 11, 1967



Left, Bill and Frances in March 1979 at granddaughter Pam's wedding. Right, in March 1982 Bill and Frances were honored with other charter members of UUCP

Bill Bishop died on Oct 12, 1987 in Scottsdale, AZ. His ashes were buried under the Blue Palo Verde trees he had planted.

sources:

"History of the First Unitarian Church of Phoenix 1947-1972" by Frances Bishop  
Transcript of the Oral History of George Rountree III, William Madison Randall Library.

<http://library.uncw.edu>

Archives of the UUCP

Communications with Johnson family descendants