

University of Memphis

## University of Memphis Digital Commons

---

Special Collections Finding Aids

Special Collections

---

2021

### MSS0198. R.E. Johnson papers finding aid

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/speccoll-findingaids>

---

#### Recommended Citation

"MSS0198. R.E. Johnson papers finding aid" (2021). *Special Collections Finding Aids*. 189.  
<https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/speccoll-findingaids/189>

This Finding Aid is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Special Collections Finding Aids by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [khggerty@memphis.edu](mailto:khggerty@memphis.edu).

**University of Memphis Libraries  
Special Collections Department**

126 Ned R. McWhorter Library  
Memphis, TN 38152 - 3250  
Phone: (901) 678 - 2210  
E-mail: lib\_sc@memphis.edu

**R.E. Johnson papers**

**Title:** R.E. Johnson papers  
**Collection No:** MSS.0198  
**Extent:** 1 cubic foot  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1918-1934

**Abstract:** The collection contains political and business correspondence and personal papers of engineer Robert Eugene Johnson (1890-1964), a vocal critic of the E.H. Crump political machine in Memphis, Tennessee.

**Processed by:** Ed Frank, 1989; Gerald Chaudron, 2022.  
**Access:** Open to all researchers.  
**Language:** English  
**Preferred Citation:** R.E. Johnson papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis

**Publication date:** 2022 August

---

## Scope and contents

The collection comprises the correspondence and personal papers of Robert Eugene Johnson (April 22, 1890-November 1964). Johnson was born in Memphis, Tennessee, the son of Robert Buford (1868-1950) and Katie Ruffin (1869-1951). He married Alma Catherine Barbieri (1889-1953) in 1913 and they had five children. He worked as a water and sewerage engineer and construction contractor but was also a critic of the city government run by E.H. Crump. He campaigned vigorously against the corruption of the Crump machine through the 1920s and 1930s by aligning himself with the local political opposition and at state level, although he often clashed with establishment figures which cost him jobs. He served as a Deputy Inspector at Large in the Tennessee Department of Finance and Taxation, Special Deputy Game Warden and Shelby County Relief Commissioner.

The Personal and political papers series, covering the period 1919 to 1934, consists of personal papers and drafts of Johnson's writings, along with carbon copies of his outgoing letters and originals of correspondence received. He was a friend of the Nashville *Tennessean* columnist T.H. Alexander. He authored the pamphlet "Edward H. Crump: Public Enemy No. 1" and a founder of the Loyal Tennesseans League which campaigned against the Crump-backed candidate for governor in 1932.

The Business papers series, covering the period 1918 to 1934, comprises correspondence, bills, receipts and other documents documenting Johnson's activities as a professional contracting engineer in Mississippi and Memphis. He worked for H.W. Nelson Company and Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation at various times during this period.

---

## Subject terms

Johnson, Robert Eugene, 1890-1964.

---

## Related collections

MSS0150. Loyal Tennesseans League records

---

## Inventory

### Box 1

Folder

## **I. Personal and political papers, 1919-1934.**

Correspondence:

- 1 1920-1923. Includes:
  1. R.E. Johnson to G. Morris, Editor, News-Scimitar, Memphis, Tenn., 1921 February 22. Questions honesty and competence of City Commissioners; comments on their supposed sacrifices "the commissioner of streets, bridges and sewers is sacrificing his business to the extent of advertising it every Monday morning in a local paper."
  2. All-American Association, Memphis, to Johnson, 1923 August 10. Acknowledges membership application.
  3. Entry in Prohibition Contest, author unknown (Alma Johnson?), New York, N.Y., "The curse of whisky has been descended upon me from the day of my birth and yet from an economic and moral point of view, I say prohibition is a failure....I say wipe out the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act...abolish the bootlegger and his brother prohibition enforcement officer, divert the money now in a channel of graft to the treasury..."
- 2 1924-1926.
- 3 1927 January-March. Re: Johnson seeking appointment to Shelby County Election Board. Includes: Unsigned copy of letter to Henry E. Colton, State Election Commissioner, Nashville, 1927 January 26. "Indeed, it's a revelation to see the name of a man being mentioned for a political appointment without bearing the official okeh of Ed Crump or the personal endorsement of his honor, the mayor."
- 4 1927 April-June. Mostly concerning Johnson's appointment to Election Board. Includes:
  1. Johnson to Harper Leech, c/o Chicago Tribune, Chicago, Ill., 1927 April 3. "...I had been in Nashville for two weeks acquainting various members of that body with the methods of the [Crump] gang in Shelby....The rest of the opposition crowd was as usual back home wishing or firing long range shots as usual. I made the fight and in recognition of same I would like to have the honor of actually dethroning the Red Headed Monster."
  2. Harry Light, American Legion Post #1, Courthouse, Memphis, to Johnson, undated (April or May 1927). "This man (H. Alberts) is a disabled Ex service man and needs a Job very Bad has a wife & 3 kids if possible give him something to do." Johnson found him a position.
  3. Johnson to Judge Leech, 1927 May 3. "Judge, I want you by all means to make a last stand for me if you can possibly do so. They are turning Hell down here to beat me out of this Shelby County Election Commissionership...They [Mayor Rowlett Paine and E.H. Crump] are supposed to be enemies now, but they will be together again on next election day....Fowler [City Engineer] is owned by Crump, Rice & Co. but he along with every department head in the City Government and they are all owned by Crump & Rice, were re-appointed the first of this year 1927 A.D. by the Honorable Rowlett Paine. Rowlett Paine is as inseparable from Crump as a Pullman porter is from his whisk broom....every appointive position in the city administration at Memphis is held by a Crump henchman and they were appointed several months after the Primary and General gubernatorial fiasco. There can be but one answer. If Rowlett Paine was against this sort

and not part and parcel of it, he would have kicked these people out. But not Rowlett. He is the gutless and spineless wonder. Personally, I like my opponent [Galen] Tate. I have always liked him, but he is universally disliked. He is the kind of a fellow you could support to-day and make him win and on Monday he would not speak to you. No one can get along with him. He is a bachelor. I have made an effort to do my part as a man. I have four children all in school. I have never backed away from any man on any kind of issue."

4. Johnson to H.E. Colton, State Election Commissioner, Nashville, 1927 May 10 (& 12). "...the unknowing yet recognize [G.T.] Fitzhugh and Tate as anti-Crump leaders. They are anti-Crump, but not leaders. The anti-Crump vote positively will not rally to their standard....As to Mayor Paine, I know he will run last for any office where no more than one hundred candidates are offered, provided however the votes be counted as cast....You are the referee. If my opponent's hand is raised, you will first have to lift him up. I rest my case. With kind regards and confidently hoping to have that commission in my pocket Monday night May 23<sup>rd</sup>. when I leave Nashville, I am, Cordially yours,".

5. Johnson to Governor Austin Peay, Nashville, 1927 May 20. "...while I was in Nashville doing something that really counted, I want to ask if you heard of any of the so-called anti-Crump leaders of Shelby County making a fight for Mr. Colton. The method of a vast majority of these anti-Crump people and they are my friends, is to send congratulations and hunt four leaf clovers. I work under other specifications....During my life I have been engaged as foreman, superintendent, engineer and contractor on some of the country's gigantic industrial construction operations. I have been in charge of all kinds of men, from the toughest to the meekest. I have been among them and I know something about them. With the vested authority that goes with election commissionership, I can guarantee handling the 'gang' down here the way they ought to be handled and it won't be with kid gloves, if I am selected."

6. Johnson to Lewis Pope, Commissioner of Institutions, Nashville, 1927 May 23. Offers employment for George M. Robertson if he receives parole.

7. H.E. Colton, State Election Commissioner, Nashville, to Johnson, 912 S. Parkway, Memphis, 1927 June 1. "...I reached a decision in favor of Mr. Galen Tate's appointment, however, this is in no way a reflection on you for you ran him a close race, and I am frank to say that every time I saw you I personally liked you better."

5 1927 July-September. Johnson tries again to get G.M. Robertson paroled, requests information concerning local governments in Shelby County, corresponds with local merchant about unsatisfactory goods, asks State Board of Education to help one of his teachers, and writes the "Memphis Press-Scimitar" concerning inadequacies of Mayor Paine's administration.

1. Johnson to Ralph Millett, Press-Scimitar, Memphis, 1927 August 1. "I have time and again tried to arrange for a physical examination of the Marjorie Bayou sewer system, for a complete investigation of all contracts in connection with the construction of the Municipal River Terminals, the Municipal swimming pool, the Tennessee St. sewer, and the Hein Park sewer system....there must be some reason for Paine refusing to publicly investigate the matters I have placed before him....I know that Mayor Paine has not much time to attend such matters, account of extensive traveling, but some of those now challenged do not hold traveling positions."

2. D.B. Sweeney, Fidelity bank Building, Memphis, to Mayor Rowlett Paine, 1927 September 11. "...in view of the serious charge made by Mr. Johnson....unless this matter is cleared up without delay, I cannot conscientiously support you, but on the other hand would feel it my duty to actively oppose you for reelection. I hope you will get this straightened out immediately..."

- 6 1927 October-December. Overton-Davis campaign committee vice-chairman Johnson invited to attend rally, has trouble with local haberdasher, and asks for work from his political opponents. Includes:

Johnson to E.H. Crump, Memphis, Tenn., 1927 December 10. Re: letter of application for City Engineer. "Mr. Crump, you know as well as any one, that I have had pretty tough sledding and have been kicked around quite considerable ....I admit that I could have avoided some of the walloping I have received, by refusing to stand in my own light, but in all of my obstinate opposition to you in the past, I am sure that you know, that I fought hard and honestly and out in the open. I have never been a party to any subterranean attacks, but have made some suggestions to the rum-dum opposition that could have been carried to successful conclusion, but they could not see. I know you well enough to know that a worthy foe has your respect and I hope I enjoy a standing of that kind with you."

- 7 1928-1930. Includes:

Johnson to Governor Alfred E. Smith, New York, 1928 October 22. "It has only been a few days since you conferred with party leaders in Tennessee, I mean so- called "leaders", and I know that your political acumen is so superior to mine as to preclude any comparison, but I think you should be tipped off to some local conditions. The Memphis headquarters of the Democratic Party is the exemplification of sheer dumbness. The manager of the dump is a newcomer to Memphis and unacquainted. As proof of his rationality, he admits that he was formerly lieutenant governor of the State of Mississippi. By accurate comparison, he is as vapid as a hophead barber....The Democratic Party in this state is composed of two factions, the Lea-Caldwell faction and the Crump faction. These factions are in death grips for control of the state....Five years ago the Klan polled around 25,000 votes in a local municipal campaign. They beat the life out of the Crump gang, but the Crump crowd had the machinery. They marked the Klan vote up for themselves and gave the Klan 5,000. The election was held in the month of August, but on the strength of a reported cold wave headed for Memphis, the ballots were used as fuel in Courthouse heating plant on the night of election. The Crump faction knows the Klan strength in this county. There is a reason for their inactivity in this campaign. If they made a fight for you, it would lessen their chance of consolidating the Klan Klowns and local Republicans after your election, with them pulling the strings. It is their only out....They are the worst crowd of double-crossers and double-dealers in America, with the exception of the Luke Lea crowd, who are only interested in capturing the state machinery and incidentally the water power resources in Middle and East Tennessee....For your information, the Lea-Caldwell faction, the Crump faction, the local Republicans and the Ku Klux Klan are all anathemas to me. I really believe the whole caboodle represents the real canaille of the whole country....My independence of the rabble has practically put me out of business. I have walloped them in season and out and they have crucified me to the extent of using their political power to crush me in the quest of private work....You have a lot of staunch friends in Memphis, familiar with your

record and demonstrable good of your governorship of the Empire State, who, like myself, wish you every success.”

1931 February-August. Johnson assails Crump machine and Shelby County Commission, carries his fight to the newspapers and to the State Board of Elections in Nashville. Includes:

1. Johnson to Shelby County Commission and the Citizens of Shelby County, c/o Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1931 February 10. "...I will point out to you a record of the most reckless, wanton, unreasonable and extravagant waste of public funds and a monument to the folly of the gentlemen of the commission, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. E.W. Hale [Commission chairman] has been cataloged by E.H. Crump as "a solid fellow". I know a "straw man" when I encounter him and will establish the value of E.H. Crump's characterization of men." Includes a detailed analysis of county and municipal expenditures, with suggestions for improvement.

2. Johnson appeal to Fellow Citizen, 1931 May 16. "...the Shelby County Legislative delegation, controlled by Crump and Overton, plan to introduce a local Shelby County Bill as soon as possible after the Legislature re-convenes May 25th, the purpose of said bill is to change the date of the City Election, now legally set for November, to a date prior to the General Registration to be held in August. Reason therefore is obvious to decent, law-abiding citizens. This Shelby County outfit is afraid of a square deal and this is prima facie evidence of the fact. They desire to use the old padded registration and this is a dastardly scheme to thwart the honest will and mandate of an oppressed people. You are urged to inform all reliable friends, kinsmen, acquaintances and associates of this situation, especially your pastor and urge them to quietly purchase poll tax immediately, regardless of how burdensome it may be at this time. City and County employees and hangers on have their poll tax now, supposedly purchased for the bond election. Purchasers at this time will probably be told by poll tax collectors that it is too late to pay and vote in bond election and that they can pay as late as September and vote in November, BUT they are planning to hold the November election in August. DO NOT FAIL IN THIS AND FIGHT TO THE LAST DITCH [sic]."

3. W.H. McMillan, 1106 Jefferson Avenue, Memphis, to R.E. Johnson, 701 Richmond Avenue, Memphis, 1931 August 10. "It is current talk amongst the old voters that there [sic] no use of going to the polls and casting their votes for the opposition and have them counted properly as an honest election return has not happened for the last twenty five years or since Crump and his crowd have secured control of the elections. I, myself am a victim of this administration by having my license as a master plumber revoked- a frame up by the P[lum]bing Inspector an appointee of Kruger the union(?) [sic] harness maker, acting or posing Commissioner of streets, sewers & health who allows his different departments to run their offices just as the unions & combinations command. This board of Plumbing Examiners never issue a license unless the "gang" gives them permission- it makes no difference how well qualified the applicant is....Now the last legislature has given them the whole county of Shelby to control. God help the farmers. Wishing you success in your endeavors."

4. Johnson to W.H. McMillan, 1931 August 12. "I know the crowd I am fighting and I know their every method. They are incompetent in everything that requires education, experience, skill, work and ordinary honesty. They are the most proficient gang of obsequious timeservers in all things that involve low breeding, dishonesty, graft,

cowardice and personal dishonor....At this moment ignorant negro mercenaries are being herded to registration booths in trucks belonging to the people, under the personal direction of white employes [sic] of various branches of the local government and at the command of high officials who claim kinship with high ideals and the first families....We must establish white supremacy in this city and when we do, imbeciles, morons, servile menials will not be able to even seek public office. The system must be crushed."

5. Johnson to State Board of Elections, Nashville, 1931 August 29. Re: charges brought against Shelby County Election Commission "I have been a legal voter in Shelby County for twenty years and I know of my personal knowledge that a LEGAL election HAS NEVER BEEN HELD IN THIS COUNTY TO DECIDE ANY ISSUE [sic].... It is high time that the precedent of complying with the election laws of the State of Tennessee be established in Memphis and Shelby County....In conclusion it is plain to me that [State Board of Elections] President Colton has used all the tricky devices and dodges known to a Sunday-school teacher, who is police commissioner of the World's murder capitol."

9 1931 September-December. Further attacks on the Crump machine, including letters to Governor, Attorney General, and other state officers. Includes:

1. Johnson to Tennessee Attorney General L.D. Smith, 1931 September 2. Includes copies of 14 letters submitted to state and local election officials concerning their derelictions. From Exhibit -- No.8. Johnson to Henry Colton, President, State Board of Elections, 1931 August 22. "At this writing I have not received a copy of either of Col. Waring's replies to my charges. Mr Moon following your instructions promptly mailed me a copy of his reply. No word of any kind has been received from Traveling Election Commissioner Townshend. Perhaps Mr. Townshend only represents absentee voters and is now traveling among Tennesseans sojourning in various parts of this country. If you hear anything from him from either Wala Wala or Newport News, please advise his exact location."

2. Johnson, 701 Richmond Avenue, Memphis, to G. Morris, President, Commercial Appeal, 1931 September 8. Reports conversations with reporters in which "Mr. Ash remarked that he was in one of Jim Mulcahy's numerous places one morning about 3:00 AM during the recent biennial registration and that Mulcahy's men had a registration book and were writing names in the book and making out registration certificates....your police reporter, Mr. "Red" Braswell, was in Jim Mulcahy's home...about the same hour one morning between Aug.10th. and Aug,20<sup>th</sup>, and he witnessed a like scene....Mr. Jim Mulcahy is privileged to operate five dives on Beale Avenue, including the famous old "Monarch" and he is also privileged to operate that famous place for the assemblage of pleasure seeking blackamoors, the "MY BLUE HEAVEN" on Polk Avenue, but I protest any privilege, right, grant, or concession, that Jim Mulcahy possesses, whether conferred formally or informally, that permits him to use a registration book for voters, as a social register for imaginary Africans. Mulcahy, it seems, is short or was short on bogus registration certificates, therefore, a Spencerian night school at the corner of Polk and McKinley Sts. was the only salvation. You will recall that I mentioned the possibility of an independent candidate for office being "guttled" at Polk and McKinley Sts. when I announced my candidacy for office. This information may no doubt shock at least one of the finer sensibilities of Brother Clifford Davis. Bro. Davis...is anchored to bootleggers, gamblers, illegal registration certificates and every other vicious and corrupting influence in this community. Brother Clifford Davis, as Vice-Mayor and Fire and Police



Commissioner of the City of Memphis, is the most palpable, obvious and blatant fraud that was ever anchored to a white community south of the Mason and Dixon line.”

3. Johnson to W. Edwards, Secretary to Governor Horton, Nashville, 1931 September 11. Concerning poll-tax and voter registration irregularities. "You are no doubt aware of the fact that no public business entrusted to Shelby County officials is transacted in the spirit and letter of the law. Statutory enactment requires duplicate poll tax receipts to [sic] kept on file and that has not been done. However, in my opinion, the original receipts would be even better to establish what needs be established ....and a lot of people in Memphis would be glad to help establish thievery in public office here as a fact. Negroes invariably keep and preserve all documentary evidence of their dealings with public officials and the “law” as they chose to term it. Uniformed state police accompanying auditors could dig out.[sic] a lot of these receipts in one days time." Poll-tax receipt books are "in the hands of bootleggers, gamblers, shyster lawyers, hangers-on, and various and sundry employees.”

4. Johnson to Governor Henry Horton, Nashville, 1931 September 12. “A majority of the people of Tennessee know that you are unprejudiced, just and honest. My estimation of you has always been likewise....From the day E.H. Crump made his first attack on you, down to this very minute, I did everything in my humble power to help you. From that day to this, I have not talked with a single member of the Shelby gang, high or low. For my loyalty to you and my department, some unscrupulous and lying acquaintances of mine, made a vicious, cowardly and lying attack upon me, to prevent my appointment as Shelby County election commissioner ....I absolutely risked my life on three occasions for two of my most bitter opponents in the election commission matter, but their attacks were made in the dark and I never had a dog's chance, when it came to meeting their viciousness in the open....When I went to work for you, I was in destitute circumstances. I can prove by school records that my children missed day after day of school, account of insufficient clothing and we made it on one scanty meal a day for a long time....When you announced my dismissal, I did not have a dollar and my final salary check was gone within 24 hours after cashing....There are several positions open here and I need employment as I never needed it before. I implore you to reconsider my case, talk to my friends like T.H. Alexander [political columnist] and let me know if something can be done for me.”

5. E.N. Haston, Secretary, Tennessee Department of State, to Johnson, 1931 September 16. "I have credentials drawn which show that your selection for election commissioner was agreed upon between Mr. Keaton and myself. I do not know what happened the day I left here with the Governor and Commissioner Baker, but on that morning the matter was to be closed and at noon Mr. Keaton told me he could not appoint you....when you are here I want you to check in with me and we will go over the matter further.”

6. Johnson to T.H. Alexander, Nashville, 1931 September 21. "It is my opinion that these three articles [from Memphis papers, not attached] should be played up constantly by all the friendly press in the state, from here on out. I think it would have a devastating effect on the Shelby gang....a world of influence could be wielded, especially by editors of small country papers, along this line; to admonish their readers to write friends and relatives residing in Memphis and Shelby county to exert every effort to down this vicious and contemptible thrust at white supremacy. A great number of the residents of this county hail from the honest to goodness white sections of Tennessee. These same

articles should be played up by small papers in northern Mississippi and eastern Arkansas, as a great number of our people hail from those sections....Please particularly note that the negro registration is greater in the county outside the City of Memphis, than the white registration. Each article mentions that the [voter] registration certificates have been confiscated by officials under appeal from felonious conviction. The bulk of them have been confiscated by bootleggers, gamblers and their ilk, some of whom are unnaturalized foreigners and subject to deportation. Mention of this last feature in public print might effectively deter some of our citizens who migrated from Palermo and points north."

7. Johnson to Ralph Millett, Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1931 September 25. "You have always been marked down in my book as a friend, a square shooter and a regular fellow in every way. I can not understand for the life of me why you did not print my full statement in connection with the Sheahan plant. I was more astounded when you printed aportion [sic] of my statement to-day that you failed to print yesterday and printed Mr. Mallory's answer to the hitherto unpublished portion....I want to say this for Gene Johnson, I can make a campaign more exciting than an afternoon nap if the newspapers will give me something resembling an equal break on space. I am a poor man, unquestionably in the most straightened circumstances of any announced candidate, but men of wealth can ramble at length in the papers and my copy is slashed to pieces....Give me a break and I will make an interesting campaign. I am not playing. I mean business."

8. Johnson to Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1931 October 15. Re: statement by Mayor Watkins Overton on "a faltering disgruntled opposition." "As a member of the opposition, I desire to state, individually, that the state administration and no individual member thereof, has made no earthly effort to assist the opposition to the Memphis-Cicero government. If the law enforcement end of the state government ever does look into the Memphis situation, it will be a sad day for Shelby gangland. As to discrediting the governments of Memphis and Shelby county, they have thoroughly discredited themselves. The Horton administration had nothing whatever to do with the building of the Sheahan pumping station, the herding of 18,000 irresponsible negroes and 5,000 irresponsible whites to the registration booths and no manner of connection with the mock trial of Billy Overton. Neither have they had any connection with paying worthless city commissioners \$7,000 per annum for four years. Overton is also credited with urging resistance of "unjust" taxes. If the small home owners of Memphis accept his advice, they will not pay one thin dime in taxes to the Overton administration, for they have been the butt of notorious discrimination and squandering of public funds, but what better could be expected from a firm of lawyers who dissolved a partnership for the purpose of one member becoming mayor, one, president of the power, light and street car company, and the third and last one, attorney for the power interests. If any good could come to the people as a whole from that kind of a combination it would establish a precedent unparalleled in American municipal government. That kind of jockeying is not on the side of the people."

10 1932 January-July. Letters to Memphis Press-Scimitar, letters of support for Johnson and Loyal Tennesseans League. Includes:

1. Johnson to E.J. Meeman, Editor, Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1932 February 18. Outlines Johnson's plan to save money and eliminate corruption in city government with handwritten notes.

2. J.W. Simes, Bemis, Tennessee, to Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1932 July 7. "He [Crump] is the supreme boss of everything there in the way of politics and holding public office. One snap of his finger and the coming election would be held without herding negroes to the polls...What about running his picture and writing him an open letter. He has more control over the situation than McAllester [sic]...I lived in Memphis until 1924. I saw lots and I moved from there after they burned up the ballots in November of 1923.... You know that every office holder down there is either directly or indirectly the beneficiary of stolen elections. With the exception of a few judges you have not got a man in office who could win in a fair election and I believe [sic] you folks know it."

3. Howell Buntin, State Game Warden, Nashville, to R.E. Johnson, 1215 Sledge Avenue, Memphis, 1932 July 18. Re: appointment as Special Deputy Game Warden. "Of course you understand that your remuneration will be one-half your fines and the officer's regular arrest fees."

4. J. Fon Davis, Burrow & Burrow Lawyers, Johnson City, Tennessee, to Johnson, 1932 July 27. "The people in this section are thoroughly aroused and I am sure that they will register their disapproval of Crump and his methods on August fourth. The pamphlet [Public Enemy No. 1?] is having the desired effect."

5. Certificate signed by Tennessee Governor Horton naming Johnson as Commissioner for Shelby County to administer Federal unemployment relief, 1932 July 28.

6. W.B. Johnston, Whiteville, Tennessee, to Loyal Tennesseans League, Memphis, 1932 July 29. "Enclosed ....little poem [titled "Black or White" referring to Edward H. Crump's recruiting of black voters] expresses the sentiment of a vast majority here. I trust that it may be of use to you in the finish of your campaign and offer it gratis...P.S. Is this work too personal for use? Does it paint "Eddie" in too raven a hue and will it be of any use to your campaign?"

11 1932 August-December. Re: gubernatorial campaign. Includes:

1. Lewis S. Pope, 408 Independent Life Building, Nashville, to R.E. Johnson, 1215 Sledge Avenue, Memphis, 1932 September 5. Pope was an independent candidate for governor. "I received your letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, on the morning that the State Committee met. I was glad to get this information, but unfortunately, they did not let us argue the case. It seems that they had stacked the committee before the meeting opened. However, this information will be valuable in the campaign."

2. T.H. Alexander, Nashville, to R.E. Johnson, 1215 Sledge Avenue, Memphis, 1932 September 12. "General Fitts of Alabama, representing Roosevelt, was here last week. He told Tom Henderson, after talking to Pope and McAlister leaders, that it was quite evident to him that the Tennessee Democrats had agreed to elect a Republican governor, but he hoped to save the state for Roosevelt. Henderson agreed. Fitts said he found the McAlister leader without hope, cussing and mad. Jimmy McCall told me yesterday that the Repubs have no money but will get some, and said conditions are very good, he believes. Heard another report from McCall to the effect that Bob Baker is playing with McAlister.....I hope you explain to Mrs J that you didnt [sic] want a job but were after bigger game. I know how women blame others--it's just natural with them and they cant [sic] help it."

3. T.H. Alexander, Nashville, to R.E. Johnson, 1215 Sledge Avenue, Memphis, 1932 September 13. "Our L.R. Connections came through big at washington [sic]. I've just talked to Edwards and he is delighted and says the Chief is likewise. Edwards says Couch

and other members of the RFC publicly corrected Holt in their presence .... Edwards now suspects that Holt was tampered with by Gen. G, or someone who was hostile. He said the RFC made him look simply an ass, correcting him in the presence of the delegation....Let me know if you didnt get your book [probably referring to "Loot", Alexander's novel exploring Southern politics and corruption.] I've had some fine reviews of the thing and negotiations for the movie rights are coming good. I may get 15 grand for those, and if so I'll buy you a vanilly sody."

4. T.H. Alexander, Nashville, to R.E. Johnson, 1215 Sledge Avenue, Memphis, 1932 September 16. "If Holt is friendly and cooperative, we'll put this over. If he isnt, we wont [sic]. Since we all know he isnt friendly at all, and has even deceived us (for which he was corrected), I see very little chance. He will impose other obligations and impossible situations. The Chief says he is hooked up with a Birmingham outfit trying to sell asphalt to the state at \$3,000 per mile and the whole thing has been explained to some of the committee... Why must we have Holt, if we have unlimited power in D.C.? Why must we take a man who has proven himself hostile? If we must have him, why cant he be disciplined? And if Holt is coming, I suggest you come back to contact him and to warn our friends at his first false move. I suggest you come back to contact him and to warn our friends at his first false move."

5. Rembert Moon, Secretary, Shelby County Commissioners of Election, Memphis, to Johnson, 1932 October 23. "Our crowd here is a mess. Petty jealousy for authority. Tommie Hooker sprand [sic] a coup and organized his Voters League. I took no part. That puts an end to an other [sic] attempt of organization here now as the same crowd joins everything and do no good. I have received practically no help on my election lists from anyone but Paul Towner....I am positively sick of the pettiness existing in our ranks.... Ben Kohn has stood up like a wheelhorse. He has brought in most of the money picked up to date....Poor old Tony Solari is the only faithful one in the crowd. He has been visiting some Italian market gardners [sic], bootleggers, etc. trying to get some fake poll tax receipts. He got some numbers, but they would not give up their papers. He is positively taking his life in his hands to do this.... By all means have Solari protected. He is absolutely loyal....Solari put up \$15.00 and has paid for gas and drinks while trying to get the information desired.... It would be a great stroke if we could get the Government send some out of town deputies in to Shelby County election day. Mr. Parr at Stewartsville said it would mean the saving of several hundred votes if a stranger just stood around and looked wise....It is plain that the gang is sitting back waiting to see how much it will take to win and then start manufacturing their majority. They are unusually quiet. So much so in fact that I am uneasy."

6. R.E. Johnson, Andrew Jackson Hotel, Nashville, to Everett Sanders, Chairman, Republican National Committee, Chicago, 1932 October 27. Copy enclosed in letter to President Herbert Hoover, Washington, D.C. the same day. "I do not know, of course, what kind of information you are getting from Tennessee, but I have been in some sixty counties and I believe President Hoover has better than an even money chance here.... I have talked with a great number who are sincerely willing to do their bit to see a gang controlled president does not reach Washington. These people regard Mr. Roosevelt as a Tammany gang product and as such want none of him. This is quite true in Memphis, where the people have been super-ganged by the notorious Crump organization...and on one occasion Mr. Roosevelt was credited with remarking about "my friend Crump in

Tennessee". That in itself would win the state for Mr. Hoover if we could get protection at the ballot box in Memphis....The Crump organization has been beaten several times by actual ballots, but on such occasions, the Crump gang burns up the ballots and writes the result to suit their fancy. Senator Nye and his investigating committee found absolute proof of this kind of business in Memphis and has a complete record of it." Lists seven reasons for thinking Hoover can win in Tennessee. "2. The women of Tennessee, especially those who are organized for religious work are for Mr. Hoover and are violently opposed to the wetness or alleged wetness of one of the Democratic planks. 3. Tennessee is predominantly rural and predominantly Protestant in religion. The state is a hotbed of religious prejudices and there has been a lot of talk about Roman Catholic domination of the present Democratic layout....6. You can not put any dependence in any of the Republican officeholders in Memphis. The Federal judge and the U.S. commissioner are Crump Republicans, but you can stop an election steal if you would send Department of Justice operatives to Memphis and transfer Judge Anderson away from Memphis for a couple of months. It would not be a bad idea to have a couple of operatives sit in the U.S. commissioner's office for a couple of weeks. 7. The announcement by the Federal Government that a fair election would be guaranteed the people of Memphis and Shelby county would be worth thousands of votes over the entire state The people are sick and tired of stolen elections."

7. Johnson to Lewis S. Pope, 1932 October 30. Suggests Pope's response to latest Crump statements. "...As to a committee of citizens of Tennessee, two from each county, to investigate the social, business and political record of me and Crump, will say that I have no court record, I was never ousted or impeached from public office and I never left the State of Tennessee to escape being subpoenaed to testify in a court of justice where my integrity was questioned. There is no need for an investigation of Crump's record. He has a black record on file in the Supreme Court of Tennessee. It is an everlasting record. The Crump organization has a record on file in Washington, D.C., the Nye investigating committee report. On the subject of records, Crump might bring out the old Oldfield report, which is a record in the department of justice at Washington of Crump gangsters ....I warn that a certain element in Shelby, Davidson and other counties will do well to heed the commandment "Thou shalt not steal", on November 8th."

8. Alma Johnson [writing on Headquarters, Lewis S. Pope for Governor, Memphis, stationery] to R.E. Johnson, Andrew Jackson Hotel, Nashville, postmarked 1932 November 7. "The gang is on to your identity as the writer of the Montgomery letter, and I believe my letter was read before it was ever given to me as Col. Waring knows that you spent \$30 for printing and \$9 for stamps and that they have not given you any money....They also know that you are in room 540 and have a check on everything [sic]. Waring told Rembert. So please be careful....Just wanted to warn you."

9. Johnson to Memphis Press-Scimitar, 1932 November 29. Re: pedestrian killed on Memphis streets. "...with the inevitable legalization of beer, wine, whiskey and liquors [sic] in the offing, perhaps those minions of the law who are supposed to look after the enforcement of traffic regulations [sic] will no doubt devote their whole time during the year 1933 to doing that very thing. In the past, under the apostolic guidance of Volstead, the bulk of their time has been spent chasing carriers of contraband liquor or visiting golf courses outside the corporate limits...Next year, perhaps, the motorcycle Jesse James'

will no doubt be forced to try their traffic cases on the spot. Let us hope so, as it is as surely effective as telling it and paying it to the judge."

10. R.E. Johnson to Governor Henry Horton, Nashville, 1932 December 22. Asks a pardon for Thurman D. Bernero who has been in prison "for some eight years....That the ends of justice have been served in this case is my firm conviction and I am taking this means of urging clemency to the extent of a pardon.... I sincerely trust that your good and true judgement will permit you to return young Bernero to his deserving parents."

Encloses petition.

11. Alma Johnson, Memphis, to R.E. Johnson, Andrew Jackson Hotel, Nashville, 1932 December 30. "You talk about a scare. it was night before last at 12:40 the telephone rang and rang and I hated to go down I was a little afraid, but I thought It might be you, so I came on down and a man said "Mr. Johnson please" and I said he is out of town and I did not catch the voice, so he said "did he leave town without saying goodbye Kiss my ass or nothing" and I said who is this and he said me and I recognized Rembert Moon's voice and was he tight!...the enclosed clipping [reporting Moon's demotion from the Shelby County Election Commission] will explain his reason....Are you having any luck with the Bernero boy? I hope so....Please drop me a line for Sunday. You would have this time 20 yrs ago."

12 1933. Includes:

1. Johnson to Jordan Stokes III, Excise Division, Department of Finance and Taxation, Nashville, 1933 January 27. "It is quite evident to me that the millennium is close at hand.... I doubt that the memory of any man runneth back to a time when a fellow with a political job was retained by an incoming administration and promoted, especially if he was capable, honest and industrious, but, you have broken the ice....If they will now get rid of that motley crew of so-called "coal oil inspectors" and give you an industrious man in each grand division of the State, I will predict big things for the department as a whole."

2. T.H. Alexander, Franklin, Tenn., to Johnson, 1933 April 10. "I am sorry to hear of your bad luck....I heard about the fracas when I was at Clarksville recently. I have been really surprised that they had not attacked you before this....I am going to start my paper as soon as I get the money. It will be a weekly and will be devoted to printing the news that the banker-kept press dares not print....I had a bottle of 4 per cent beer last night... Sho' did taste noble, but it was green and gave me the botts."

3. Luke Lea, Nashville, to John Erwin, National Press Building, Washington, D.C., 1933 August 16. 8-16-33. " He [Johnson] has relentlessly worked against Crump and the Memphis gang, and has so incurred their displeasure and fear that...he is entirely unable to make a living... he has not only been attacked financially but also physically, having been beaten up twice since Spring by henchmen of the Memphis gang.... He is undoubtedly well qualified for a position in connection with the administration of the Recovery Act, and I will greatly appreciate it if you will find a way to get his application before Secretary Ickes..."

3. T.H. Alexander, Franklin, Tenn., to Johnson, 1933 October 17. "I applied for the job of director of public relations of the TVA just to test their honesty, for I knew I could get A-1 endorsements and I felt sure they would ignore them. I got William Randolph Hearst, Clarence Darrow, Meredith Nicholson, Roark Bradford, Marquis James... but no could do. So yesterday I withdrew my application telling them it was too late for anyone to

unscramble their public relations. What they want is a combination of the late P.T. Barnum, Jesus Christ and the prophet Isaiah, and they are ripe to fall into the hands of some Jewish promotor on Wall Street.... I had a nice letter from Mencken two weeks ago. He wanted some articles. I have a Chinese stink pot I am going to send him on the TVA, but...cautious friends advise me not to sign my own name." Talks about corruption in the TVA and discusses the newspaper business in Nashville.

- 13 1934. Includes advance press-release of Lewis Pope's first speech of the 1934 gubernatorial campaign; statement taken by Johnson of eyewitness to theft of U.S. Surplus Commodity foodstuffs, and a request by A.B. Wade, President of the Memphis Voters League, that the matter be investigated, 1934 June 11.
- 14 Undated. Includes some incomplete letters.
- 15 Miscellany, 1919-1934. Includes business cards, voter registration certificates, hotel bills, water bills, phone bills, car repair bill. Typed and handwritten notes on corruption,
- 16 Miscellany: Political, undated. Poll watchers' instructions, drafts of Loyal Tennesseans League membership forms, membership application for Voter's League of Shelby County, flyer from L.A.G. political group, political poem.
- 17 Photograph, undated. View of storefront voter registration office, 29<sup>th</sup> Ward, 2<sup>nd</sup> Precinct, Memphis, Tenn. Possibly a newspaper photograph.

## **Box 2**

### **II. Business papers, 1918-1934.**

- 1 Correspondence: Albert H. Wilhelm, Ben Avon, Pa. to Johnson, 1926-1927. Includes June 5, 1927 letter in which Wilhelm criticizes President Coolidge's tardy response to the crisis.  
Correspondence, bills, receipts:
- 2 1918-1919.
- 3 1920.
- 4 1921.
- 5 1923.
- 6 1924.
- 7 1925. Includes copy of Certificate of Incorporation of the H.W. Nelson Company, Delaware, 1921 (1925 copy).
- 8 1926.
- 9 1927, 1.
- 10 1927, 2.
- 11 1928.
- 12 1929-1934.