

## Johnson “John” Richard Barbee

Johnson “John” Richard Barbee was born January 1843<sup>1</sup> on a large plantation<sup>2</sup> in Green County, Kentucky. He was the sixth of nine children of Elias Barbee; his mother Sarapta J Graham being the second wife.<sup>3</sup> On the 1850 and 1860 censuses, the family lived in Weston, Platte, Missouri. In 1870 John is farming in Weston with his youngest brother, next door to his mother and sister.<sup>4</sup>

John was 17 and in his first year at Liberty College when the Civil War broke out. Without asking his father, he ran away and became a standard bearer in the Confederate Army.<sup>5</sup> The beautiful silk flag was presented by the ladies of Platte City. In his first battle, he lost both the flag and his horse.<sup>6</sup> He served four years; after the war he decided to head west to start a new life.<sup>7</sup> He arrived in Virginia City, Nevada.<sup>8</sup> His vocal hatred of Yankees prevented him from getting a job, and he roamed over most of Nevada, prospecting. Then he heard about the strike in Silver Reef, Utah.<sup>9</sup>

In 1880, John was living with his older (half-) brother William Tecumseh Barbee, who was a mine superintendent in Silver Reef.<sup>10</sup> John married Katherine “Kitty” Appleby, a Scotch girl, in 1881 and they had four children.<sup>11</sup> One child evidently died at birth, and a daughter died at age three of accidental drowning.<sup>12</sup> After the death of this child, John began to drink heavily and threatened to padlock the Barbee mine shaft and get out of Silver Reef. His wife didn’t want to leave her daughter’s grave.

By the summer of 1892, John's mine in Silver Reef had stopped producing and about this same time he heard about the gold strike in Cripple Creek, Colorado. Soon after hearing of the gold strike in Cripple Creek, he sent his wife and Mabel east to live with his brother Graham's family in Kansas City while he went to Cripple Creek to look for a claim and place to stay for his family.<sup>13</sup> There were bad feelings in the situation, so Kitty and her daughter Mabel moved to Salt Lake City. John promised he would return for them when he struck it rich.<sup>14</sup>

Kitty was tired of waiting, so in October 1892, she and Mabel arrived in Cripple Creek by train. They lived in a tent for a year until Johnson bought a four-room house on West Golden Avenue. This home was destroyed in the second Cripple Creek fire in 1896. The family moved into a fire victim relief tent until Johnson was able to rebuild their home. Johnson eventually sold the home and decided to move back to Silver Reef. Upon their return they discovered it was abandoned, so they returned to Cripple Creek the following year.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Cripple Creek Days, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> [Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org)

<sup>4</sup> United States Census, 1850, 1860, 1870.

<sup>5</sup> Cripple Creek Days, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*, 1922, Vol 30, p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> [Mabel Barbee Lee biography.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Cripple Creek Days, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>11</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>12</sup> [Mabel Barbee Lee biography.](#)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Cripple Creek Days, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> [Mabel Barbee Lee biography.](#)

In 1900, Johnson was living in Cripple Creek, Teller, Colorado, as a mine superintendent.<sup>16</sup> He leased the Columbia mine at Beacon Hill.<sup>17</sup> In 1902, he made an extended visit to Utah and then returned to Cripple Creek.<sup>18</sup> His wife, Kitty, died of pneumonia in May 1904.<sup>19</sup> His daughter Mabel offered to come home from college and live with him, but he told her “I still don’t think a mining camp’s any place for a girl without her mother. You can come Sundays one in a while, but not to stay”.<sup>20</sup>

Johnson died in his sleep in August 1906 in Cripple Creek, Teller, Colorado, at 63 years of age.<sup>21</sup> During the long funeral procession, hundreds of men lined the street with bared heads.<sup>22</sup> His obituary spoke of a “pioneer citizen, a mining man of long experience and sagacity; a man who bore the respect and esteem...”<sup>23</sup>

Both John and Kitty were buried in Mt Pisgah Cemetery in Cripple Creek. It is interesting to note that their daughter Mabel was attending college when they died. Her college expenses had been covered partly by her parents, partly by summer jobs, and partly by a scholarship. After her parents died, \$150 was donated from the residents of Cripple Creek so she could continue. This money was sent at the rate of \$15 a month by the druggist in town. Mabel tried to repay the money but was told that it was donated by the residents in a large glass fishbowl labeled “for John’s girl” in the pharmacy window.<sup>24</sup>



(Image from familysearch.org; Blue Lodge masonic emblem)

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<sup>16</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>17</sup> *The Weekly Gazette* [Colorado Springs], 20 February 1901, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Mining Reporter*, 1902, Vol 45, p. 364.

<sup>19</sup> *Weekly Gazette*, 5 May 1904, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Cripple Creek Days*, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 220.

<sup>21</sup> Find-a-grave.

<sup>22</sup> *Cripple Creek Days*, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 220.

<sup>23</sup> *Cripple Creek Days*, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 222.

<sup>24</sup> [Mabel Barbee Lee biography](#); *Cripple Creek Days*, by Mabel Barbee Lee, p. 230.