

DISCLAIMER

This biography is a rough draft and a work-in-progress.
The research has not been completed, so there may be errors and omissions.

This record also lacks 1950 federal census data.
Please return to Tuscania1918.org in the future to see if a revised and
finalized version is available.

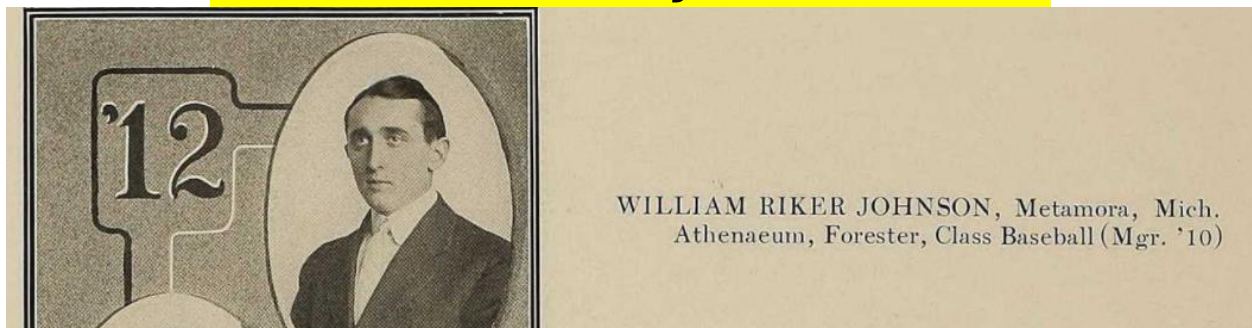
Abbreviations:

b = born

d = died

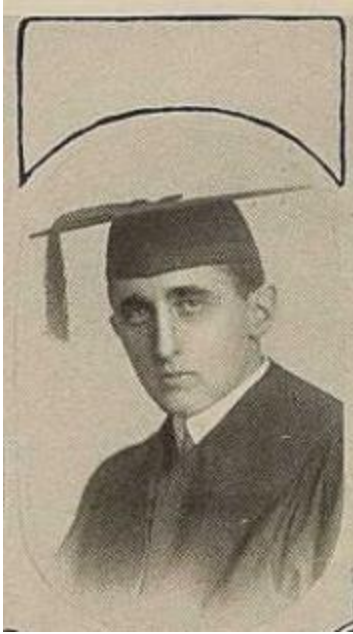
F: = Find A Grave (www.findagrave.org)

NOK = next-of-kin

TUSCANIA**Tuscania casualty****Johnson, William Riker****1890 MI – 5 February 1918 Tuscania**

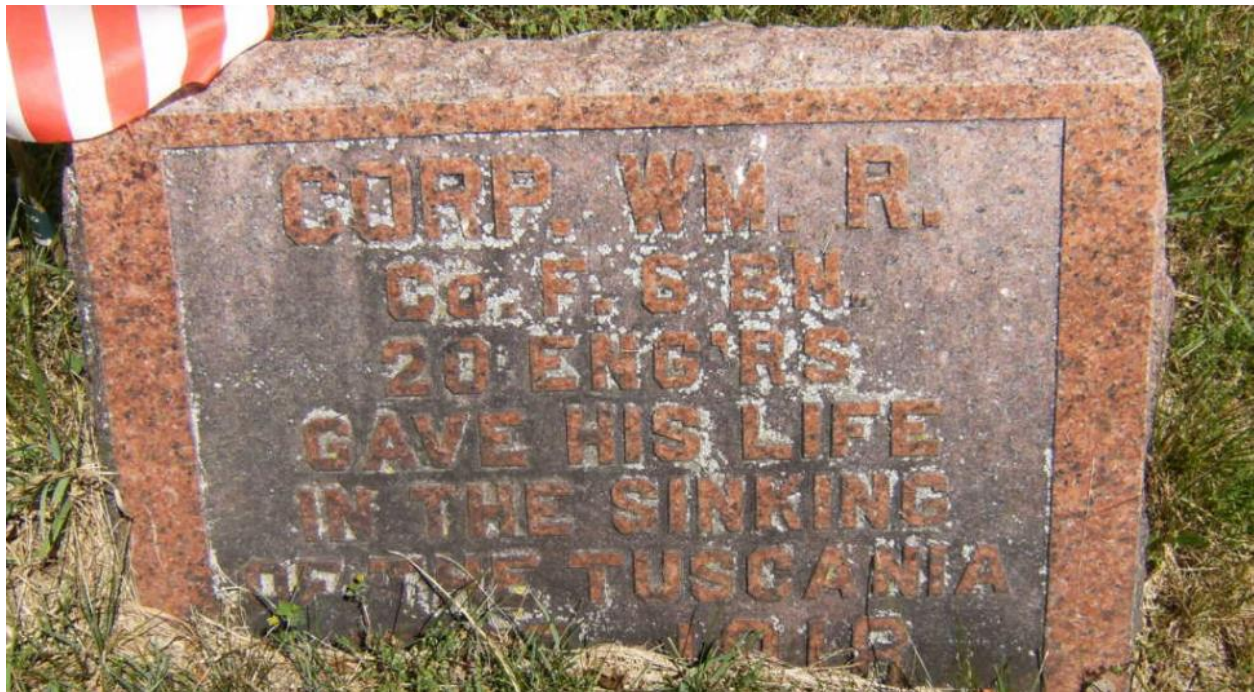
William Riker Johnson - Michigan State College, Class of 1912 –

https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/12664747/person/12596837172/media/ac807bf2-3c69-4efa-9a8b-4bc5e4f3a530?_phsrc=hFB19699&_phstart=successSource



William Riker Johnson, Metamora
 Ag., Athenaeum, Farmers' Club, Class
 Baseball (Mgr. '10)

https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/12664747/person/12596837172/media/0ec63475-b76d-4cb5-860e-18c6e1683031?_phsrc=hFB19699&_phstart=successSource



Grave - https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/12664747/person/12596837172/media/3d101cfa-1160-4256-8fb8-bb454517c1c9?_phtarg=hFB19700

Corp. W. R. Johnson, a former M. A. C. student who was on the torpedoed Tuscania, is the only M. A. C. student who is known to have been aboard the ship. Johnson's home address is Metamora, Mich. He was a member of Company F, 6th battalion, Michigan engineers. Johnson was in the forestry service for duty in France and went through a course of training at the American University camp in Washington, D. C.

Johnson graduated with the class of 1912. He was a member of the Athenaeum society and was manager of the class baseball team in 1910. After graduation he was for a short time in the state forest service. He was called in the first draft and went to Camp Custer for training. There, because of his training in forestry work, he was transferred to the 20th engineers' corps.

"Lansing (MI) State Journal" 8 Feb 1918 p 2

JOHNSON LOST ON TRANSPORT

M. A. C. MAN IS BURIED
IN SCOTTISH GRAVE.

RECEIVE LISTS

Names of Sammies Buried in
Scotland Cabled; Plan
Memorial Monument.

W. R. Johnson, an M. A. C. graduate of the class of 1912, has been officially reported as one of the Tuscania's dead. A list of names received this morning from "A Scottish Port" indicated that Mr. Johnson was one of the Yankee heroes buried "in a long trench containing 78 victims."

Mr. Johnson was a member of the forestry unit aboard the Tuscania. While his home was in Metamora, Mich., he spent much of his vacation time in Lansing. His cousin, Mrs. A. W. Lester, is an employe of the Arbaugh store.

"Have you received word about Mr. Johnson?" asked Mrs. Lester this afternoon. "We didn't know that he was on the ship until we saw his name in the list of men on board. His mother is frantic."

After running down a list just received over the Associated Press wire of men buried in Scottish soil, one of the editors found the name of "W. R. Johnson, Matamora."

"He's lost" was the slow reply, turning to Mrs. Lester.

Fighting back a cloud of bitter tears, she said hopelessly, "Perhaps—perhaps—oh, maybe there's a mistake. If there is—will you—will you—let me know."

After his graduation, Mr. Johnson was in the United States forestry service, and for the past two years had been at his home in Metamora. Some of his vacations while in M. A. C. were spent in Montana. Clifford McKibbin, one of his classmates at M. A. C., says of him: "Everyone in college liked him, and he was one of the pleasantest and most agreeable men in the class." He was interested in baseball, being a member of the class team and manager during his sophomore year.

He served in the depot brigade at Camp Custer and was transferred to the base hospital. On account of his qualifications and because of the fact that he had applied for entrance to the forestry regiment of the 20th engineers, he was sent to Washington and had been training with that division since December. He had been promoted to the rank of corporal in Co. F, of the 20th engineers.

"Lansing (MI) State Journal" 13 Feb 1918 p 1

JOHNSON IS AMONG TRANSPORT'S DEAD

**Dispatch Telling of His Res-
cue Discredited By Later
Official Report.**

A report received from Detroit this morning, stating that William R. Johnson of Matamora, M. A. C. graduate was among the Tuscania survivors is discredited by a Flint dispatch telling of an official message to Johnson's mother in Lapeer, announcing his death.

Johnson was first reported lost in dispatches received from Scotland Wednesday.

The Flint message, finally establishing the fact of his death as follows:

By Associated Press.

FLINT, Feb. 14.—Information was received here from Lapeer Thursday stating that the mother of William R. Johnson, of Matamora, had been advised by the war department that her son, who was a passenger on the Tuscania was dead. There has been much confusion regarding Johnson's fate, his name having become confused with another, he first being reported lost, and later as saved.

"Lansing (MI) State Journal" 14 Feb 1918 p 1

East Lansing.—One hundred and twenty-five of the Michigan Agricultural college's 725 enlisted men have already reached France. But one death has been reported, that of W. R. Johnson, '12, who was lost on the Tuscania.

"Yale (MI) Expositor" 21 Mar 1918 p 2

WRITE MAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD

SOCIAL SECURITY NO.		CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		44 ^{State} 6100	
If veteran, name war		MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH Bureau of Records and Statistics			
FULL NAME		Retta L. Hartwig		Local File No. 5	
PLACE OF DEATH:		Lapeer		USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:	
County		Lapeer		State Michigan	
Township		Hadley		County Lapeer	
City or village		Hadley		Township	
Name of hospital				City or village Hadley	
Length of stay: in hospital		(If not in hospital, give street address.)		Street no.	
		In this community 50 yrs.		Citizen of foreign country?	
Sex		Color or Race		If yes, name country	
Female		White			
Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced		Widowed		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION	
NAME OF HUSBAND or WIFE		Frank G. Hartwig		Date of death October 6, 1942	
Name		Age, if alive		I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from 19 to 19. I last saw him alive on 19. Death is said to have occurred on the date stated above at 12:30 P. M. Duration	
Birth date of deceased		Nov. 17, 1891		Immediate cause of death	
Age: Years Months Days		50 10 13		Mitral Stenosis with decompensation of heart	
Birthplace		Hadley, Mich.		Other contributory causes of importance	
Usual occupation		Teacher in public school		Major findings and dates: Of operations	
Industry or business				Of autopsy none	
Father		Chas. P. Johnson		In case of violence, state if accident, homicide or suicide	
Birthplace		Hadley, Mich.		Date 19	
Mother		Minnie Bates		Where did injury occur? (Specify city, county, or state)	
Birthplace		Michigan.		In industry, home or public place?	
Informant		Mrs. Neil Peddie		Was disease or injury related to occupation of deceased? no	
Address		Hadley, Michigan.		Signature H. M. Best and coroner	
(Burial, cremation or removal) (Circle the word which applies)				Address Lapeer Mich.	
Place		Hadley			
Cemetery		Greens Corner			
Date		Oct. 6, 1942			
Funeral director's signature		Laird Funeral Home			
Address		Lapeer, Michigan.			
Filed Oct 19, 1942		Robert P. Penson			
		Local Registrar			

MI death certificate for his sister Retta L. Johnson Hartwig -

https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/60872/images/44471_355441-02359?pld=603042400



His parents, Charles P. Johnson & Jennie/Jeannie Bates Johnson - From Find A Grave 8353347



"St. Joseph (MI) Herald-Press" Thursday 20 Jan 1927 p 2

Michigan State College Dedicates Memorial to World War Soldier Dead

EAST LANSING, Mich., Nov. 12—(United Press)—A bronze tablet bearing the names of 48 Michigan State college war heroes stood here today, the Armistice memorial offering of the present student body.

Over it hung a floral wreath which paid tribute to William Riker Johnson, state's first student to be killed in the World war.

Leon Green, a senior from Greenville, presided over the exercises at which Col. John Emory, of Grand Rapids, past national commander of the American Legion, spoke in depreciation of pacifist propaganda.

"St. Joseph (MI) Herald-Press" Saturday 12 Nov 1927 p 3

Sees Tablet Unveiled To War Victim At East Lansing

Lapeer, Nov. 13.—Mrs. Charles P. Johnson, 61, died Monday at her home near Hadley. She was born in Hadley, May 23, 1866 and married Charles P. Johnson, Sept. 28, 1883.

William Riker Johnson, a son, was drowned when the *Tuscania* was torpedoed off the coast of Scotland in 1918 in the World war.

Surviving are the husband, a son Bert, and daughter, Mrs. Retta Hartwig, of Hadley, a sister, Mrs. Fred Selby and brother, Roy Bates of Hadley and three grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had attended the unveiling of a bronze memorial tablet at East Lansing, honoring their son, who was the first Michigan State college man to die in the World war, on Armistice day, and whether the emotional strain was too great for her, causing a stroke, has not been determined.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the residence with Rev. E. T. Potter officiating, and burial will be in the Hadley cemetery.

Did the stress of seeing a tablet unveiled to her deceased son William Riker Johnson on 11 Nov 1927 cause his mother Jeannie/Jennie to have a fatal stroke on 14 Nov 1927? "Port Huron (MI) Times Herald" Tuesday 15 Nov 1927 p 10

A bronze memorial honoring the 48 student heroes of Michigan State college was presented to the college by Clyde Olin, East Lansing, in behalf of the student body. The East Lansing American Legion added a floral wreath, paying tribute to William Riker Johnson, first Michigan State college student killed in the World war.

Armistice Day commemoration at Michigan State College [now University] – "Detroit (MI) Free Press" Saturday 12 Nov 1927 p 11

HADLEY—Gilbert G. Johnson, 46, shot himself to death with a rifle yesterday in the woodshed at his farm home near here.

Suicide of his brother Gilbert G. Johnson on 23 Apr 1933 near Hadley MI – “Benton Harbor (MI) News-Palladium” Monday 24 Apr 1933 p 10

HADLEY—Gilbert G. Johnson, 46, committed suicide Sunday by shooting himself with a rifle in the woodshed of his farm home near here. His Father, Charles P. Johnson, found the body. A sister, Mrs. Loretta Hartwig, also survives.

Suicide of his brother Gilbert G. Johnson - “Detroit (MI) Free Press” Monday 24 Apr 1933 p 8

1. PLACE OF DEATH		MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH Division of Vital Statistics CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		State Office No. 44 3570	
County <u>Lapeer</u>				Register No. <u>5</u>	
Township _____					
Village <u>Hadley.</u>					
City _____		(No. _____ St. _____ Ward _____)		(If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number)	
2 FULL NAME <u>Bert G. Johnson.</u>					
(a) Residence No. _____		St., Ward _____		(If non-resident give city or town and state)	
(Usual place of abode)					
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred		yrs. mos. ds.		How long in U. S., if of foreign birth? yrs. mos. ds.	
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS					
3 SEX <u>Male</u>	4 Color or Race <u>White</u>	5 Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (WRITE the word) <u>Single</u>			
5a If married, widowed or divorced HUSBAND of (or) WIFE of _____					
6 DATE OF BIRTH (Month, day and year) <u>Aug. 1, 1886</u>					
7 AGE	Years	Months	Days	If LESS than 1 day ____ hrs. OR ____ min.	
<u>46</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>22</u>			
8. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, sawyer, bookkeeper, etc. <u>Farmer</u>					
9. Industry or business in which work was done, as silk mill, saw mill, bank, etc. _____					
10. Date deceased last worked at this occupation (month and year) _____					
11. Total time (years) spent in this occupation _____					
12. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) <u>Hadley</u> (State or country) <u>Mich.</u>					
13. NAME <u>Charles P. Johnson</u>					
14. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) <u>Hadley</u> (State or country) <u>Mich.</u>					
15. MAIDEN NAME <u>Jennie E. Bates.</u>					
16. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) <u>Hadley</u> (State or country) <u>Mich.</u>					
17. INFORMANT <u>Charles P. Johnson</u> (Address) <u>Hadley, Mich.</u>					
18. BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL Place <u>Hadley, Mich.</u> Date <u>Apr. 26, 1933</u> <u>H. L. Baird</u>					
19. UNDERTAKER _____ (Address) <u>Lapeer, Mich.</u>					
20. FILED <u>Apr 28, 1933</u> <u>James C. Long</u> Registrar.					
MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH					
21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) <u>April 23, 1933</u>					
22. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from _____, 19____, to _____, 19____					
I last saw h. _____ alive on _____, 19____; death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at <u>6.30</u> m.					
The principal cause of death and related causes of importance were as follows:					
<u>Rifle wound in head.</u>					
<u>Suicide.</u>					
Other contributory causes of importance: _____					
If operation, date of _____					
Condition for which performed _____					
Organ or part affected _____					
Was there laboratory test? _____ Autopsy? _____					
In case of violence state if accident, homicide or suicide. <u>Suicide.</u>					
Where did injury occur? <u>Hadley, Mich.</u> (Specify city, county or state)					
In industry, home or public place? <u>Home.</u>					
Was disease or injury related to occupation of deceased? <u>No.</u>					
Signed <u>H. L. Baird</u> <u>Coroner.</u> M. # _____					
Address <u>Lapeer, Mich.</u>					

MI death certificate for his brother Bert G. / Gilbert G. Johnson -

https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/60872/images/44471_355440-03072?pid=2619686

JOHNSON WILLIAM RIKER		C	7 090
Cpl Co F 29 Eng		K	
Metanna Mich		A	
Sn	Died 2/6/18	T	370 051
Born 6/19/90		R	
Enl	Dis	CL	
		I	7 790

U. S. VETERANS BUREAU
MAIL AND RECORDS
Form 2802—Rev. Sept., 1935

INDEX CARD

2-12000

Name: William Riker Johnson

Name variations: misidentified on Steven Schwartz's website as a MI casualty and an Oregon survivor

Military:

On Tuscania: 20th Eng. 18th/Co. F - corporal

Serial number: Army enlisted men were not assigned serial numbers until after the sinking of the Tuscania showed their value, so William did not have one at the time of his death

Entered service from: found as both Reedsport, Douglas Co. OR & Metamora, Lapeer Co. MI, as his father Charles P. Johnson resided in both locations

Sailed on "Tuscania" as: William R. Johnson

Next-of-kin on "Tuscania": father Chas. [Charles] P. Johnson, Metamora MI

First buried on isle of Islay, Scotland: in Kilnaughton, Islay, Scotland - grave 8, as W.R. Johnson

Body returned from war on: "Antigone" arriving Hoboken 29 Sep 1920

Body listed on return ship as: W.R. Johnson

Rank & unit on return ship: cpl, Co. I, 20th Engrs

World War I draft registration (1917): as William Riker Johnson - b. 26 Jun 1891 Hadley MI; res: Metamora, Lapeer MI. Age 26. Single. Resident of Metamora MI. Farmer, employed by his father at Hadley MI. Military experience: private, Infantry, 4 years, MI Agricultural College. Short in height, medium build.

Veterans Administration Military Index:

Enlistment & discharge dates not listed

Born 19 Jun 1890

Died 6 Feb 1918

Address: Metanna MI [Metamora MI]

Rank/unit: corporal, Co. F, 29th Engineers

Birth & death:

Born: 26 Jun 1890 (tombstone, MI Births, Veterans Administration Master Index) or 26 Jun 1891 (WWI draft) or 19 Jun 1890 - Hadley, Lapeer MI

Died: 5 Feb 1918 Tuscania

Find A Grave record: 8353356, presence on Tuscania indicated in text

Burial location: Hadley, Lapeer MI

Cemetery: Hadley Community Church

Tombstone: Co F 6 Bn 20 Engrs. Gave his life in the sinking of the Tuscania

Father: Charles P. Johnson, Jun 1856 Hadley, Lapeer MI – 9 Dec 1942 Hadley, Lapeer MI. Son of John/Joseph R. Johnson & Emily Corg Kelly (?) (F: 8353349). Buried in Hadley Community Church Cemetery, Hadley, Lapeer MI.

Find A Grave: 8353347

Mother: Jeannie (Jennie) E. Bates Johnson, 22 May 1866 Hadley, Lapeer MI – 14 Nov 1927 Lapeer Co. MI. Daughter of Gilbert Bates & Elizabeth Davenport. On 112 Nov 1927 Charles & Jennie attended the unveiling of a bronze memorial tablet to William at East Lansing, the first Michigan State College man to die in WWI. Her obituary wondered if the stress caused her fatal stroke. Buried in Hadley Community Church Cemetery, Hadley, Lapeer MI.

Find A Grave: 8353352

Parents' marriage: 30 Sep 1883 Hadley, Lapeer MI. Charles was age 27, b. Hadley MI, resident of Hadley MI, farmer – Jennie Bates was age 20, b. MI, resident of Hadley MI. By clergyman Thomas Howes.

Spouse:

Spouse Find A Grave:

Marriage:

Children:

Siblings: William was the 2nd-oldest child.

- Gilbert George ("Bert") Johnson, 1 Aug 1886 Hadley, Lapeer MI – 23 Apr 1933 near Hadley, Lapeer MI. On his WWI (1917) draft card, he reported being a farmer for his father. He said his parents were dependent on him; a note is added that they are not solely dependent on him. Died by suicide; shot himself in the head with a rifle in his woodshed at his farm home. His body was discovered by his father, Charles. Buried in Hadley Community Church Cemetery, Hadley, Lapeer MI. F: 8353351
- Retta Lovina Johnson Hartwig, 13 Nov 1891 Hadley, Lapeer MI – 6 Oct 1942 Hadley, Lapeer MI. Wife of Frank George Hartwig (1890-1923, F: 66398105) whom she married 29 Jan 1916 in Hadley, Lapeer MI. They had 3 children: June, Genevieve & Faith. Frank died 15 Feb 1923 near Hadley MI; survived by his wife, 3 children, parents Mr. & Mrs. Robert Hartwig & brother Earnest Hartwig. Retta died of mitral stenosis. Was a public school teacher. Buried in Hadley Community Church Cemetery, Hadley, Lapeer MI. F: 66398174
- Arthur Claud Johnson, 14 Nov 1892 MI – 27 Aug 1893 MI. Buried in Hadley Community Church Cemetery, Hadley, Lapeer MI. F: 8353354

Notes:

Pre-war:

Michigan Agricultural College graduate 1912

Wartime:

"Port Huron (MI) Times Herald" 11 Feb 1918 p 1 – there were exactly 100 men from MI on Tuscania. Ten are still missing, among them Corporal William R. Johnson.

"Lansing (MI) State Journal" 13 Feb 1918 p 1 - MI Agricultural College graduate 1912. The report was received today that William is buried in Scotland. His home was in Metamora MI but he spent much time in Lansing. His cousin Mrs. A.W. Lester, who is employed at the Arbaugh store, asked the newspaper today if it had any word as his family did not know he was on the ship Tuscania until a list was published. "His mother is frantic." A wire from the Associated Press had just come into the newspaper office, so the employee scanned in & found that W.R. Johnson of Metamora had been buried in Scotland. "He's lost," the employee told her in a slow reply. She cried & said maybe it's a mistake; let her know if it was wrong. After graduation from MI Agricultural College (MAC), William worked for the US Forestry Service, the past 2 years in his home of Metamora. Some of his vacations while at MAC were taken in MT. Everyone liked him at college, "one of the pleasantest and most agreeable men in the class." In sophomore year, William was on the class baseball team & manager. He was in the depot brigade at Camp Custer & transferred to base hospital. Was training in Washington D.C. since Dec 1917, promoted to corporal.

"Yale (MI) Expositor" 14 Feb 1918 p 2 – as yet unaccounted for: William R. Johnson, corporal, Metamora MI

Post-war:

Namesake of the William Riker Johnson American Legion Post No. 205 in Lansing MI.

Obituary:

Censuses:

1900 Hadley, Lapeer MI

Charles Johnson, 44 MI, Jan 1856, parents b. NY, married 15 years, farmer

Jennie E., 35 MI, May 1865, parents b. NY, gave birth to 4 children, 3 are living

Gilbert B., 13 MI, Aug 1866, at school

William R., 9 MI, Jun 1890, at school

Retta S., 8 MI, Nov 1891, at school

1910 Hadley, Lapeer MI – his family but not William – was he at college?

Charles P. Johnson, 53 MI, parents b. NY, in 1st marriage, married 24 years, farmer, general farm

Jennie E., 44 MI, parents b. NY, in 1st marriage, gave birth to 4 children, 3 are living

Gilbert B., 23 MI, laborer, home farm

Retta L., 18 MI

John R. Watts, 51 England, hired man [his information as emigrated 1889, alien is written on Retta's line on the form]

