

## Frank Johnson's Band <sup>[1]</sup>

## Frank Johnson's Band

by Thomas C. Parramore, 2006; Revised October 2022.

Frank Johnson's Band was a popular brass ensemble of black musicians that played frequently at health spas, balls, tournaments, state fairs, and other occasions from the 1830s to about 1870. Organizer and leader Frank Johnson was said to have been born enslaved on a [Roanoke River](#) <sup>[2]</sup> plantation in [Northampton County](#) <sup>[3]</sup> in 1774. He earned enough as a fiddler to purchase his freedom, along with that of his wife and children. Johnson's band included some 15 members, all or most of whom were his sons and nephews. "Old Frank," who conducted in a stovepipe hat and spike-tailed coat, could play any instrument and was a fine dancer, sometimes performing at balls in that specialty. He also called the numbers for square dances and reels.

Johnson's group was a favorite among well-to-do planting enslavers and was said to perform only for [Democrats](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. The last known appearance of the band seems to have been at a tournament in [Halifax](#) <sup>[5]</sup> in 1866. The band had dispersed by 1871, by which time Old Frank, at the age of 97, was reportedly residing in Tarboro.

### Reference:

Thomas C. Parramore, "Old Frank Johnson-and the Day the Music Died," *The State* 61 (April 1989).

### Additional Resources:

Cromwell, John W. "Frank Johnson's Military Band." *Southern Workman* 29. 1900. p.532-535. Reprinted in *The Black Perspective in Music* 4.No. 2. July 1976. p.208-212. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1214510> <sup>[6]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Jones, Charles Kelley. *Francis Johnson (1792-1844): Chronicle of a Black Musician in Early Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses. 2006. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Vu\\_rOw7kFYC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Vu_rOw7kFYC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false) <sup>[7]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Carnes, Mark C. *American National Biography: Supplement 2*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press. 2005. p.286. <http://books.google.com/books?id=wZczV8Zxg4C&lpg=PP1&pg=PA286#v=onepage&q&f=false> <sup>[8]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Johnson, Francis. "Favorite Waltz, or Spanish Dance." Ms. Coll. 126, no. 10.183? Keffer Collection of Music Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania. <http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/fjfw.html> <sup>[9]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Johnson, Francis. "Philadelphia Firemen's Cotillion." Philadelphia: G. E. Blake. Circa 1815-1841. Box 34, no. 14. Keffer Collection of Sheet Music, ca. 1790-1895. University of Pennsylvania. <http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/pmpfc.html> <sup>[10]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Trotter, James M. *Music and Some Highly Musical People*. Boston: Lee and Shepard. 1881. p.306. [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28056/28056-h/28056-h.htm#Page\\_306](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28056/28056-h/28056-h.htm#Page_306) <sup>[11]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Delany, Martin. "Chapter XIV. Late Men of Literary, Professional and Artistic Note." *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. 1852. <http://web.archive.org/web/20100416021802/http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/delany/artists.htm> <sup>[12]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

Edouart, Auguste. "Frank Johnson, Leader of the Brass Band of the 128th Regiment in Saratoga, with his wife, Helen." (silhouettes) 1842–44. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/90004095> <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed August 17, 2012).

### Subjects:

[Black and African American People](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[Musicians](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

### Authors:

[Parramore, Thomas C.](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

1 January 2006 | Parramore, Thomas C.

## Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/frank-johnsons-band> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/rivers/roanoke> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/northampton> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/democratic-party> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/halifax> [6] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1214510> [7] [http://books.google.com/books?id=Vu\\_r\\_Ow7kFYC&pg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Vu_r_Ow7kFYC&pg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false) [8] <http://books.google.com/books?id=wZczV8ZxgL4C&pg=PP1&pg=PA286#v=onepage&q&f=false> [9] <http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/tjfw.html> [10] <http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/pmpfc.html> [11] [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28056/28056-h/28056-h.htm#Page\\_306](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28056/28056-h/28056-h.htm#Page_306) [12] <http://web.archive.org/web/20100416021802/http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/delany/artists.htm> [13] <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/90004095> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/african-americans> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/musicians> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/parramore-thomas-c> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->