

Bessie's Motorcycle Kidney Belt

Bessie bought a Harley Davidson motorcycle in Washington DC in June of 1941. She ordered her motorcycle belt on July 15. The belt is leather and is meant to protect the kidneys from all the jouncing and vibration while riding a motorcycle. It might also be called a kidney belt. The leather is stiff and must have been rather uncomfortable. Modern kidney belts are made of a fabric.

She made a trip to South Dakota on the motorcycle in August 1941. Bessie can be seen wearing the belt on a visit to South Dakota. Jeannette died April 9, 1942.







Bessie on left wearing the belt with Anne and sister Jeannette.


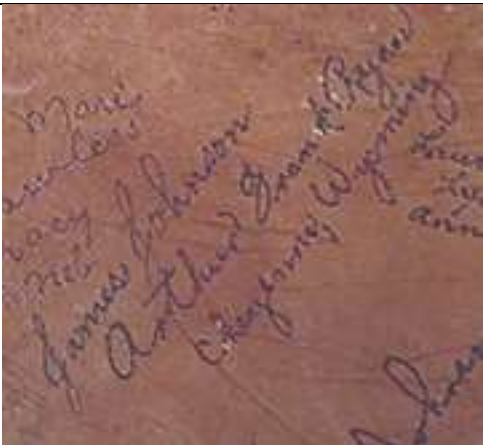
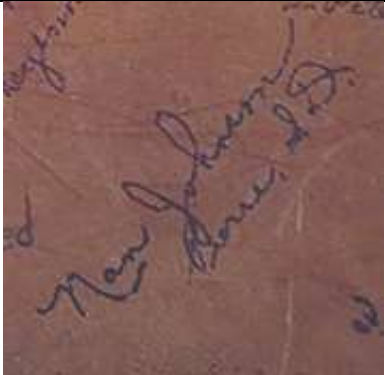
The signatures from her Johnson and Lawless families were very likely made on her August 1941 trip.


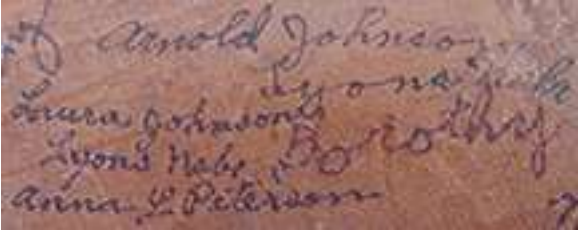


This is the whole belt:





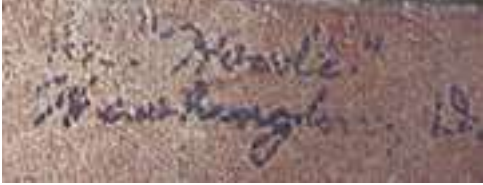





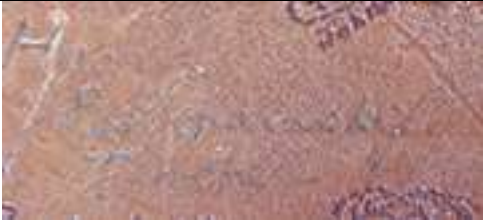


The belt is unique in that Bessie had friends and relatives sign it. The following pictures show the actual signatures and some drawings on the belt. The signatures and pictures are not touched up on the belt itself. Some photo adjustments were made when the marks are difficult to see. Some of the marks are worn. Some of the marks almost overlap. Notes by each picture identify who signed it and what the relationship is.






Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>This section has several names. Following are closeups of these names.</p>	
<p>Carlos Rosario (Ramirez?) The last name is not very clear. It sort of looks like Ramirez. Bessie took Spanish classes in DC, so this might be someone she knew there.</p>	
<p>Donald S. Breed U.S. Army</p> <p>He was Bessie's boyfriend about the time she met Ray. She cared for him. This is from her diary, December 10, 1940: "Got a letter from Don saying we had to forget our love. It hurt me & I cried a lot."</p>	
<p>Anna Marie John Lawless Macy Neb.</p> <p>John Lawless was Bessie's uncle, the brother of Anna Lawless Johnson. Anna Marie was one of his daughters. They lived in Macy NE, a small town close to Decatur NE. It is near or on the Omaha Indian Reservation.</p> <p>John died in 1956</p>	

Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>Joe (Wings) Kiker USNAC – U.S. Navy Air Corps The name is carved in the leather with a knife in two places. He drew wings in one place that indicate he may have been a pilot – along with the nickname.</p> <p>Wings was probably someone Bessie knew in DC. Bessie worked at the War Department and also went to the All States Club dances. Nothing else is known about him.</p> <p>The lower picture with the wings has the caption: Wings Kiker.</p>	
<p>James Johnson Arthur Frank Ryan Cheyenne WY</p> <p>James Johnson was Oliver’s brother.</p> <p>Art Ryan was probably a boyfriend or just a friend. They also appear to be friends even after Bessie married Ray. They exchanged many letters.</p>	
<p>Nan Johnson Pierre SD</p> <p>Probably not a relative. Bessie lived and worked in Pierre SD for a time after she got out of high school.</p>	

Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>John Pugh Miller S.D.</p> <p>Johnny Pugh and Bessie may have had a relationship before Bessie moved to D.C. They were also motorcycle buddies.</p> <p>John lived in Miller the rest of his life.</p>	
<p>Arnold Johnson Lyons Nebr.</p> <p>Laura Johnson Lyons Nebr</p> <p>Anna L Peterson</p> <p>Arnold was James Johnson's son, Bessie's first cousin (Oliver's side). Laura Johnson, James Johnson's wife, Arnold's mother. Anna Peterson was a relative of Laura (Peterson Johnson) (maybe a sister?). Dorothy is Bessie's sister and her full signature is shown in another picture.</p>	
<p>Dorothy Johnson</p> <p>Mary Johnson Miller S.D.</p> <p>John Christiansen Miller S.D.</p> <p>Dorothy and Mary were Bessie's sisters. They signed before they were married. Mary married John Christiansen September 16, 1941.</p>	
<p>Evelyn Johnson Lyons</p> <p>Evelyn was James Johnson's daughter, so Bessie's first cousin on Oliver's side.</p> <p>There is some wear, but the name can be seen.</p>	

Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>These were Bessie's Friends – Carl Labor, Miller S.Dak. Georgene Kuebel, Pierre, S. Dak Jas. K Norfolk Jr., Wash DC Laurence F Maeler(?), Washington DC</p> <p>Carl and Bessie rode motorcycles together. She mentioned him in some letters.</p>	
<p>Victor Johnson</p> <p>Bessie's older brother. The little holes originally had brass studs.</p>	
<p>H.R. Gibbs McLean Va Note the diamond ring beside his name. Bessie and Ray were engaged by August 1941. Married April 4, 1942.</p>	
<p>Bertha Cable Stigler Oklahoma</p> <p>Bessie's roommate for a while in DC during the time she and Ray were courting.</p>	
<p>(?) "Houda" (?) Washington DC</p> <p>Friend</p>	

Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>Bernice Maock (?) Pierre S. Dak</p> <p>Possible friend from Bessie’s time in Pierre.</p>	
<p>Marilyn Gibbs Pratts, Virginia</p> <p>Ray Gibbs’ youngest sister.</p>	
<p>Bessie with a rope tied in a knot.</p> <p>Symbol of her marriage to Ray?</p>	
<p>Harry Penshasky(?) Teacher</p>	
<p>Eileen Johnson Miller S.D.</p> <p>Bessie’s sister.</p>	
<p>Mary Eileen Lawless</p> <p>Daughter of John Lawless. Bessie’s first cousin on her mother’s side.</p>	

Notes – ID, relationship	Picture
<p>Anna Johnson Old Brown House</p> <p>Bessie's Mother</p>	
<p>Oliver Johnson</p> <p>Bessie's Father His last name is very faint.</p>	
<p>Cecelia W Hlebanja Hayes South Dak.</p> <p>Bessie's best friend until the 1940s. Writing is very faint.</p>	
<p>Jeannette Johnson</p> <p>Bessie's youngest sister. About age 8 at the time she signed</p>	
<p>Kathleen Johnson O.B.H. (Old Brown House) Miller So. D.</p> <p>Bessie's Sister</p>	
<p>Florence Eilers Pierre S.D.</p> <p>Friend</p>	